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# The Mountain Cannoneer; or, A War Mystery of Antietam.

By ANTHONY P. MORRIS.



The old cannoneer sticks by his gun in the slaughter on the Antietam.

## The Mountain Cannoneer;

—OR—

## A WAR MYSTERY OF ANTIETAM.

BY ANTHONY P. MORRIS

## CHAPTER I

## A SOUTHERN SYMPATHIZER.

It was on the eve of one of the remarkable and decisive battles of the great civil war.

The famous Confederate General Lee had crossed the frontier into Maryland, after several conquests, and the Union army found itself in a condition merely defensive and rather humiliated before the nation.

Dismay was in the shattered ranks of the battalions at the capital after Pope's disastrous campaign; but a vast thrill pervaded the weary army when it was known that once again the soldiers' favorite chieftain, McClellan, was to reassume command of the nearly vanquished troops.

At the date on which our story opens, the brave and able general who now guided the destiny of the blue clad host had been fortunately apprised of Lee's intention to possess himself of Harper's Ferry, and even then the former was in a position to succor Colonel Miles—having brilliantly swept open the passes of South Mountain and sounded through the struggle there the signal guns that might have apprised the garrison at the ferry of his formidable proximity.

But Harper's Ferry had surrendered to Jackson and Walker, McClellan had come too late.

Not too late, however, to interfere with Lee's contemplated campaign; for, being aware of the caliber of the general who was now marching against him, Lee now saw that a great battle must be fought, and skillfully began concentrating his forces for the inevitable struggle.

East of Sharpsburg, facing the purring waters of the Antietam, were the stern fronts of the Southern generals whose names for valor history will remember, and to the north, east and southeast slowly approached the long lines of blue in grand array beneath the flowing glorious stars and stripes.

Thus matters were when we take the reader to a commodious dwelling to the west of Sharpsburg, on the Shepherdstown road, the home of James Bartholemew, a wealthy gentleman whose broad acres extended nearly to the glistening shore of the Potomac river, winding its snaky course at that point.

Bartholemew was one of those who, despite the sample of rags and suffering and perceptible disintegration which pervaded the Confederate host, had partaken of that spirit of enthusiastic support for the cause of the South, which Lee had so confidently, and it appeared vainly to the greater extent, counted upon as its store for him when he began this campaign for the "restoration of Southern liberties" in Western Maryland.

A thorough secessionist from the first, he had had no fair or safe opportunity of proclaiming his sympathies until now, when he saw, as he declared, the advent of the movement which would terminate in the complete overthrow of the government at Washington.

A man of small stature, with a fringe of whitish-gray hair, a very nervous temperament, and twinkling blue-gray eyes that contained a cunning expression fairly foxy.

Foxy he was, for at the age of nearly sixty years he had accumulated considerable wealth, by speculation and otherwise in the management of his land thereabout, and long ago had acquired the reputation of being unmistakably miserly in all things excepting what contributed directly to his own personal comfort.

A confirmed bachelor he had ever been, but in the household of James Bartholemew there was the fairest young girl of any in all the country round.

No more ward was she.

A mystery was woven in the life of lovely Belle Bartholemew, to whom he had given his name; and many in the town of Sharpsburg could recall the night when he had taken under his roof—much to the astonishment of every one—a helpless little infant who came from where no one ever could ascertain, and who seemed to have touched the only tender spot in the miser's acrimonious nature.

A brunette of rosy type, with flashing, penetrating, merry black eyes, an exquisite figure, a hand that dispensed her miserly protector's money at times so freely among those who deserved charity that the old man was wont to storm at her in a rage that invariably ended in a kiss from her rich lips to bring back the smile to his wrinkled face.

Uncle Jim he had always been called by this bright, winsome vision of beauty.

Night lay over the road that wound its circuit before the house.

The Confederate lines that were marshaled on the west of

Sharpsburg had drawn in closer to the town, and only a few stragglers in gray could be detected now and then in the gloom, following carelessly in the wake of McLaws, who had come to unite with Lee from the detour by way of Shepherdstown.

In the great parlor of this square, stone dwelling, old Bartholemew was pacing to and fro unrestedly. He rubbed his skinny palms together like twining eels, he shook his sparse hair on his jerking head, and from his thin lips, muttered:

"She'll be killed! She'll plunge her neck into the line of some fool of a picket and have her head blown off—I know it! Forever riding, forever skipping, dashing, flying about when she ought to be shut up out of danger, like any other sensible girl! I've a notion to help the jade out in her suicidal intentions—no, no, no, I don't mean that! But she worries the soul and life out of me. Hey, who's this?"

For as he half raved about somebody of something which seemed to cause a sort of frantic uneasiness, there was a heavy footstep on the broad porch, and a small darky came running in with the intelligence that a visitor had arrived.

"It's de Massa Cap'n wot hes de big 'staches," announced the boy; and with eyes still rolling, and turned in the direction of the person approaching, the boy sidled in a manner of deep awe around the door jamb.

The comer was a tall man of fine physique, attired in a full suit of gray, with great slouch hat, wearing a heavy sword at his belt, and in the belt a monstrous pistol.

His face was not unhandsome, but there was something about the sinister curl of his immense black mustache and in the piercing black eyes, that seemed to repel the beholder.

A doughty Confederate was he—Captain Jack Striker, of Jackson's division.

As he appeared, old Bartholemew hastened forward to greet him warmly.

"Ah, my dear captain. You are back among us again. I'm glad of it; I do not know of any one I would rather see enter my house than yourself, excepting it be General Lee himself. Be seated," wheeling forward a chair. And he called sharply: "Pomp!—Pomp! you son of night! where are you?"

"Hyar, Massa James."

"Wine, Pomp—bring us some wine—and cigars, too, Pomp.

While the negro had hastened for the refreshments, Captain Jack Striker seated his large form in a chair with the air of a man who feels that he has a perfect right to the fullest hospitality of the house.

But there was a slight frown on the captain's face as he half-absently answered to the other's nervously rattling volley of questions:

"Yes, we've just got back from that little affair at Harper's Ferry. It was an easy matter to run the Yanks in from the heights, and some blood was spilled. Miles got his death wound, it has been rumored by the scouts—all the better. But I did not come here to talk of that fight, friend Bartholemew. I have something important to say to you; and if you don't want your house pulled slam down about your ears, you'll pay close attention, and take summary action upon the subject I mean to communicate—"

"My house pulled down you say?"

"Precisely so."

"Why, what in the world— But here is the wine. Have a slip, my dear captain. Light a cigar. There—what are you talking about? My house pulled down? Explain."

With his own glass poised in hesitancy near his lips, James Bartholemew looked searchingly at the Confederate officer, the expression of his countenance one of wondering perplexity.

## CHAPTER II.

## A BLUNT PROPOSAL.

The words next uttered by Captain Striker, for some weighty reason, caused the face of James Bartholemew to pale slightly.

"Do you want that ward of yours to run your neck into a halberd, or bring you out before a platoon of soldiers to be shot?"

"Halter! Shot!"

"I said it."

"I do not see what you are driving at?"

"Listen, then, and you will understand. Perhaps you are not aware of the doings of Miss Bell. But these are times when military people judge a man's proclivities by his surroundings to some extent, especially if a member of his own family is guilty of strange doings not consistent with the profession he makes aloud—"

"My dear sir"—breaking in nervously—"please tell me what you are getting at? What have I done? What has anybody done?"

"Ah, now you speak it"—dashing off his liquor at a gulp.

"Now, you strike the key. What has anybody done? Miss B—"

has done, is doing, something that will bring destruction on you as sure as you stand there."

"She! Impossible! Belle would not do anything to compromise either herself or me."

"There you are wrong. Sit down. Let us discuss this thing quietly."

With wide eyes, Bartholemew seated himself in an opposite chair, staring at the captain in astonishment.

"I am afraid," said the gray-suited officer, "that your ward, Miss Belle, is not so staunch a Southerner as she has led you and me and everybody else to think. Wait, now, I will explain my meaning. We know that ever since McClellan left Frederick, his couriers and spies have been thick all over the locality between here and that place; some of them, fortunately, have been captured and strung up. But there has been one, it seems, that the shrewdest of our army could never trap, and who must be the one who was so cunning as to get possession of the order from Lee to Jackson and McLaws, sending them to capture Harper's Ferry, and which order was revealed to General McClellan. The spy of whom I speak is a woman—so the scouts say."

"A woman!"

"Yes, and no ordinary one, either;" with an ominous twinkle in the black, piercing eyes.

"Well, sir, well?"

"She is seen, at times, dressed in a riding habit of gray. At other times, it is believed, she has successfully assumed the garb of a farm boy, and numerous masquerades besides; a very smart young girl, in fact, who had better be devoting herself to the cause which she leads everybody to believe is the paramount love of her heart—the good cause of the South."

"Have I not said that your ward, Miss Belle, would cause you to be shot as a Yankee sympathizer if you do not put a stop to her doings! No, I did not exactly say it, either; but that is what I mean."

"What!" as the other's meaning dawned upon him, "you hint that Belle is a spy for the accursed Yankees?"

"That is just what I declare."

"Preposterous!"

"You will find out to your cost that there is nothing preposterous about it, but a succession of hard facts. In plain words, Miss Belle is a spy."

Old Bartholemew seemed too overcome by surprise for utterance. He stared into the captain's face like one bewildered.

"But it is not yet common knowledge that such is the identity of this bold young lady!" pursued Striker, letting his chair down and tilting it forward the other way confidentially, while his voice sunk lower. "I may say that there are not a half dozen besides myself who have penetrated the secret."

"But it is a most ridiculous suspicion."

"No suspicion at all, I say; it is a fact. Now let me tell you that it has not been twenty-four hours since I saw Miss Belle in conversation with a very suspicious character at the Potomac ford to whom she gave a package of papers. Could you swear as to where she was just twenty-four hours ago?"

A half smiling exclamation broke from the old man.

"Yes, sir; yes, I can."

"Oh, you can?"

"Undoubtedly. She was here in this house; I saw her at exactly twenty-four hours ago ascending the stairs to the library. I spoke with her," and as if he had utterly overthrown any suspicions which the captain might have entertained, he rubbed his eely fingers in and out in satisfaction.

"Have you any proof beside your own word?"

"Why, captain!" in astonishment that his own word was not entirely sufficient.

"Because," added Striker, "if there comes an investigation you will need it, the additional proof, I mean."

"Pomp! Pomp!" called the old man, a little excitedly.

"Hyer, massa."

"When did you see Miss Belle last? For," to the captain, "to tell the truth, I have not seen her since last night."

"Seen de Miss Belle las' night," answered Pomp.

"What time?"

"Jes' 'bout dis time, Massa James."

"Would you swear to that, you little rascal!" put Striker, wheeling frowningly upon the boy.

"Pomp must have understood the nature of an oath, for he replied promptly:

"Deed I would. G o e s I knows Miss Belle."

Bartholemew dismissed him.

"So you see," laughed Bartholemew, though the laugh was not as free from uneasiness as he would have wished it to appear, "it would be impossible, my dear sir, for the young lady to be in two different places at the same time."

Captain Striker seemed to be somewhat puzzled.

He arose and began walking thoughtfully before the old man and muttered.

"There is a mystery here, then, for I will make oath that I saw Miss Belle at the ford, talking with a man who wore a big white beard. I was within twelve feet of the pair, and I very plainly recognized her voice.

"If you thought you had discovered a mare's nest, and came to put me on my guard, I am all the same obliged to you," said Bartholemew, and it was evident that he was in earnest. "But you see you must have been mistaken, so there's an end of it."

Striker resumed his seat. He regarded the other steadily over the rim of another glass of wine which he filled, and when he had carefully wiped his long-ueded mustache, said:

"Take a good look at me. I am not such a disagreeable appearing man, am I?" was the quite surprising question that next came from the captain.

"Well, no; rather a handsome man, if I do not flatter you too broadly."

"And I have the honor to stand pretty well in your esteem, I believe, eh, Bartholemew?"

"High indeed, sir," answered the wondering old gentleman.

"Then, sir, let me say that the chief object in my coming here to-night is to ask that I may have your permission and aid in securing the beautiful Miss Belle for my wife. I am, as you pretty well supplied with the necessary cash to—"

"Heigho!" breaking in. "Are you in love with my ward?"

"That is precisely it."

"This is a surprise."

"Will you aid my suit with her?"

"Now that is something," half whined old Bartholemew, "that I must hesitate to undertake. Belle is pretty much her own mistress. I have no objection to such a match, but to aid you—Hark! I think she is coming now. Suppose you try your suit yourself."

And as if glad of an interruption that just then occurred, he arose and stepped toward the hall.

The interruption was a sound of rapidly galloping horsehoofs on the short path leading up from the road to the house.

Pomp, the negro boy was seen to flit swiftly past the doorway, as if to meet the comer.

## CHAPTER III.

### BELLE BARTHELEMEW.

While he stood at the door waiting the entrance of some new arrival, James Bartholemew was saying, in his mind:

"Forsooth! this Captain Striker is a blunt fellow—a man with considerable assurance. Hardly a year have I known him, and presuming upon the fact that I have always made him very welcome at my house, he asks me for my ward as a wife as coolly as he would for the loan of a horse. I am glad Belle is here. I think that is she on the path. Zounds! I hardly knew how to answer him."

The captain, mentally, as he looked first toward the dark entryway and then at the form of old Bartholemew:

"He evaded me—the rat! but I have made up my mind that Miss Belle is the most beautiful girl I ever saw, and that I shall have her for a wife. I think I have a means of compelling both him and her to listen agreeably to my offer of marriage."

The something which Striker inwardly promised himself was to insure the success of his suit for the hand of the Southern beauty, has been in a measure shown in his brief conversation of the previous chapter.

In a chapter to follow, the reader will see what good cause the Confederate officer had to believe that the young girl was a spy for the hated army of the North.

Outside was heard the hoofstrokes of a dashing rider who seemed careless whether the horse plunged directly into the house as it came forward.

Suddenly, as if there had been a fierce jerk on the bridle by a master hand, the sound ceased, and simultaneously:

"Pomp!" rung a cheery, musical voice.

"Hyer, Miss Belle."

"Yes, it is Belle," again muttered Bartholemew, not loud enough for his companion to hear. "Now, then, let us see what she will say to this bold Captain Striker if he is bold as to ask her to marry him—and I think he is bold enough for anything."

"She comes," passed within the expectant brain of Striker, and he fondled his luxuriant mustache and smiled in anticipations of promise based both upon coquet and the knowledge that, if he chose, he could make considerable trouble in the family of James Bartholemew. "If she will listen sensibly to an offer that any other woman would consider an honor," he mused, "then it will be plain sailing, and I shall be a very happy individual. If she declines, I—well, let us see if she will decline."



A quick, firm footstep in the hall, then into the room walked a very vision of loveliness.

"How do you do, Uncle Jim?"

"How do you do? you say, and you have been gone all day. Look, you miss—"

"There, there, now; don't scold. Who—"

She was about to ask who the visitor was, as her eyes rested on him suddenly.

Then:

"Good-evening, Captain Striker."

The captain bowed his profoundest.

Bartholemew seemed to be briefly flushed by the smiling admonition not to scold.

But as the lovely brunette slowly drew off her riding gloves, an oppressive silence fell upon the trio.

"I have done myself the honor to call this evening, Miss Belle," said the captain, "upon a very important matter which concerns both you and me."

"Concerns me? Important? What can it be?"

"May I hope that you are not too tired after your unusually long ride to hear what I have to say?"

"Excuse me," said old Bartholemew, and he whisked out of sight into the hall, mumbling as he went: "Oho! he is bold enough. He will jump right into the business of asking her to marry him. A dashing fighter is Captain Striker. Let us see if he can win a victory here."

It was evident by the old gentleman's expression of face that he had no idea of his lovely ward accepting the captain's suit.

"What is it you have to say to me?" she inquired, constrainedly, and taking a seat not far from the still standing officer.

"You must be aware, Miss Belle, that I am a soldier of no mean reputation. I am also a man of some means. I will be plain to what I have to say. I have seen but little of you, but that brief opportunity has resulted in my feeling a very deep regard for you and I earnestly desire you to become my wife."

He paused, for she had immediately risen, with brows elevated, and regarded him in utmost amazement.

"Will you accept the offer of my heart and hand, Miss Belle?"

"Assuredly—no," was her ready response.

He bowed his peculiarly profound bow, and said:

"It is not altogether unexpected by me—this answer. But be kind enough to listen to me—"

"Not further upon this subject, sir."

Calmly he stroked his mustache, pulling the ends, until his lips dragged slightly apart and showed his white teeth disagreeably.

"It will probably be better for yourself, Miss Belle, if you hear what I shall say, since I see that I cannot woo you as a lover might."

"Will you please tell me how long you have been absent from your home—where you were at about this hour last night?"

"Captain Striker, I consider this impertinence."

"For your own good, answer me," he urged, in the tone of a man who would compel obedience.

Belle was erect. She gathered her rich, gray hued riding-habit up over one arm—the movement displaying a dainty booted foot that wore a glistening spur—and into her cheeks rose an additional color of indignation at the captain's manner and speech.

Some quick, resentful word was upon the ripe lips but she controlled the impulse and merely gazed at him in naughty silence.

"For your own good, Miss Belle, tell me, if you dare, where you were at about this hour last night?"

"I decline to answer. Since when you have constituted grand inquisitor, sir? Excuse me—" She would have swept past him and from the room, but he detained her with outstretched hand, and the smile on his bold, dissipated features was ominous.

"A moment."

"Let me pass, Captain Striker."

Deeper grew the color in the cheeks of the warm blooded Southern girl.

"Miss Belle, it pains me," he said, with a hypocritical tone it was impossible to conceal, "to inform you that in these times there is little attention paid to sex when a spy is taken in the very midst of camp. I am sure it would make me feel sad to see so beautiful a girl as yourself dangling at the end of a rope."

"What do you mean?" she demanded, sharply.

"Ah, Miss Belle, you wear a popular suit of gray, and you make everybody believe that you are a true Confederate. But you are playing a dangerous game—a very dangerous game, I assure you. Come, I know, and there are others who know, that you are in communication with the Yankee foe—I myself saw you, last night, handing papers to a ragged fellow, a companion spy no doubt, near the Potomac ford—"

He was abruptly checked.

Belle advanced to a position directly in front of him, and her lustrous black eyes flashed a dangerous fire.

"You lie, Captain Striker. It is not a pretty speech from a woman's lips—but I say, you lie! Stand aside."

"Beware!" he said, silybantly. "I can prove what I am saying. It is in my power to destroy even so lovely a being as yourself. I love you—"

"You love!" she interrupted, with a cutting sneer.

"Ay, and so madly that, if you cannot accept an honorable man's suit, I shall—"

To her bosom leaped one of her plump, strong hands. The next instant she had him covered by the muzzle of a gleaming revolver. Her voice was terribly impressive as she cried, in an anger still under a wonderful control:

"Stand away from that door! Hesitate a minute, and as sure as there is a Heaven above, I will send a bullet through you!"

Reckless soldier though he was, Captain Striker was not exactly a fool. He must have been aware of her nature, for he instantly obeyed the order, while the frowning barrel followed his movements until he had made clear the way to the door.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A GHOST AT THE STABLE.

At the moment Belle would have passed by and left her insultor, there transpired something that was a little startling, causing her to pause.

From somewhere outside the house there rung up a yell as of some one in mortal terror.

Not a single yell, either, for following the first sound was a succession of cries that were almost blood-curdling.

A step that was recognizable as that of James Bartholemew was heard hastening along the hall.

The next instant he was demanding sternly of some one who approached with scamping feet:

"Hello, here! what the dogs is the matter? Speak out, you little black imp!"

Following this, the voice of Pomp, wailing, moaning, stuttering in overwhelming affright:

"Oh, do good Lord! Oh, save me, Massa James! Oh, do ghost—de ghost! Out dar—oh!"

"Ghost? What are you talking about? Speak?"

"Oh, do good Lord! Hyer I see Miss Belle go in de parlor while I took de boss to de stable, and dar—and dar—oh, Massa James!—dar I see Miss Belle ag'in, a-standin' dar by de do, an' longside o' her anoder ghost like debil himself with dar'y face, wot skered do life outen me!"

"Pomp, you little ass, did you put Miss Belle's horse away and give him feed?"

"No, 'indeedy, Massa James. I jes' flew away from dar, an' I can't go back no more dis night, if you lisek de hide off'n me—'deed I can't. De ghost de oder presence ob Miss Belle, am a stalkin' roun' dar."

"Bah!"

And here sounded something like a kick, which brought additional wailing from black Pomp.

Into the captain's eyes had come a singular light as he heard the frightened avowals of the negro boy.

To Belle it contained no import beyond the fact that something had frightened the lad, which he had magnified into a ghost. But she did understand that her horse, an animal she idolized, was being neglected after the hard ride she had given him, and availing of the captain's prompt obedience to stand aside, she hurried past him, giving him no more thought than if he did not exist.

In the hall she passed old Bartholemew and the moaning, terrified Pomp, saying:

"Don't scold him, Uncle Jim. He is only a boy, and I suppose he has imagined himself frightened at something. I will attend to Diamond."

Bartholemew returned to the parlor.

Captain Striker was walking to and fro, his sword raised restfully over his arm.

"So you thought you would come back to say good-by to a guest, did you?" he half snapped, turning toward the ratty-faced old man.

"Now, my dear captain, what is the matter?"

"The matter is that I have been rejected. And the matter is that I do not mean it shall stand that way. Harkee: I believe you have that negro scamp trained to swear to anything you may say to shield your ward from suspicion. But it won't work. I am going from here to inform Lee, himself, that the worst spy of all the Yankee host is Belle Bartholemew. You are harboring and shielding her. You know all about her doings. We'll see if I cannot be, at least, reeveged upon her if I cannot have her for my own; and you will feel what Captain Jack Striker can do when he makes up his mind."

Striker was evidently in a riot of rage. His thick, dark brows were knit in a terrible frown.

The old man threw himself into a chair with a weary sigh.

"I cannot help what you do, captain. I know you are misin-

formed, that you have been deceived by your own eyes. Belle is innocent of the charge. But I can say no more."

With an ungentlemanly oath, the tall captain started from the house.

Hardly had he left the porch, when he was arrested by the approach of a squad of mounted men, whose sabers jangled as they rode forward.

The ranger leader threw himself from his horse, and beckoned Striker to one side.

"I am doing a little business on my own account," he said, in an undertone. "For some time past I have seen a young lady galloping around the country on a black horse, and she attired in a full suit of gray. A very pretty girl—lovely, in fact. Last night she crossed the Antietam below the last bridge. To-night I got on her track again, and we traced her—"

"Well?" as the other hesitated.

"Traced her here!"

"Hush!" admonished Striker, quickly grasping the ranger's arm. "Not so loud, my friend. I am on the same trail. Did you recognize this girl, or woman, whom you suspect—for I see you have suspicions?"

"Of course I have suspicions. I believe her to be a spy. No, I haven't had a square look at her face."

"Then I am further on the trail than you. Be guided by me to some extent."

"All right."

"Come inside. You are acquainted with old Bartholemew?"

"No."

"Well, I will make you acquainted. Come."

The two captains entered the house.

Bartholemew was still seated where Striker had left him.

In the old man's face was a dejected look; for he had been muttering:

"She'll be the ruin of me—of us both. What can she be doing? I know she indulges in wild rides, but I cannot believe that she is false to the Sunny South? No Ah! new-comers."

He heard the sound of approaching horsemen without.

Upon the reappearance of Captain Striker, accompanied by another in regimental gray, he arose to receive them.

"A friend of mine," Striker introduced, "Captain Sorrel. Be acquainted, gentlemen."

Whatever might have passed upon this introduction, it was interrupted strangely.

As the two men advanced to grasp hands, a pistol-shot sounded outside.

It was in the rear.

Following the shot, a clatter of iron shed hoofs.

"Something has happened to my ward!" exclaimed Bartholemew.

He ran past the two officers and out to the rear.

Also curious to know what the shot signified, they followed.

They were just in time to catch a glimpse—an uncertain glimpse in the gloom of the night—of a fleeing rider who was making away by the field beyond the stables. This rider was a woman, whose long habit streamed far out behind the swift horse.

An examination of the stable revealed that Belle's favorite beast, Diamond, was missing.

The rangers, attracted by the shot, had come around from the front.

Striker whispered something into the ear of Captain Sorrel.

"No!" exclaimed the latter; "you don't mean it?"

"But I do. And I tell you, you are right, for I myself saw the girl hand some papers to a fellow in rags, at the ford, last night. Off with you!"

"Follow me, lads!" cried Sorrel, to his men.

In a few seconds the rangers, with Sorrel at their head, were galloping away in the wake of the apparent fugitive.

"Sobe! that is the game this pretty girl 's playing, is it?" he muttered, by jerks, on his speeding animal. "Well, I should hate mightily to kill a woman, but if I can come up once more with this bold spy in petticoats, I shall either bring her in a prisoner or have her bored with bullets, depend!"

"You see," said Captain Striker, maliciously, to old Bartholemew, "they are even now after your ward. I shall have some revenge, mind that, if I cannot possess the lovely Belle."

He wheeled off and was presently lost in the darkness.

Bartholemew had returned to the house, his own mind in considerable perplexity.

"Can it be that it is so, after all?" he questioned himself.

## CHAPTER V.

### CHASING A SPY.

Straight to the center-table, whereon stood the decanter, went James Bartholemew on re-entering the parlor.

In another moment his glance rested upon something that had not been on the table when he hurried out to see what could have caused the pistol-shot.

A folded paper! The paper tied with a string to a small pebble. Some one must have been within the room during his absence. What was the paper?

Curiously he took it up and unfolded it.

The next instant he uttered a short, low cry, and half staggered back, clapping one hand on his brow.

What he read upon the paper was this:

"James Bartholemew, beware! Fane Fusor still lives. The sacred trust that was his shall yet be carried out, despite your villainy."

"His writing! his writing!" burst from Bartholemew's lips, as from one overcome by a combined fear and amazement. "Can the dead rise to life again? Am I dreaming? Save my soul! if Fane Fusor is alive, after all, what reckoning will he not call me to!"

Crumpling the paper into his pocket, he cast guilty glances around, and muttered, in a strange way, over and over

"Fane Fusor alive! What is going to happen now? and I cannot account for everything! I have wasted and I have spent too much of the trust; I have lost sight of one whose life to him, I know, was as precious as his own. Curse the fate that ever brought Fane Fusor back to life, when I so surely thought him dead—dead long ago."

A remarkable change had come over James Bartholemew within those few seconds. He looked now like a man who momentarily expects to be confronted by something or somebody whose presence could terrify him to his soul's core—looked a very criminal, nervous, snuffing, searching glances about, and with one hand in his pocket crumpling the mysterious piece of paper which had so wrought upon him.

While this scene transpired in the home of James Bartholemew, far to the north, beyond the sunken road leading to the canal, on, sped the mounted form of a female with the rangers in hot pursuit.

Surely it must be Belle!

She was making toward the woods to the northwest of Sharpsburg, and fearlessly she rode the steed so well known as belonging to Belle.

"Courage, good horse; keep it up, good fellow; we'll soon be safe from those coming behind," she spoke to the animal, which seemed to be exerting its muscles with an almost human knowledge of the pursuers in the rear.

Her voice, too, was the voice of Belle Bartholemew.

To her right were the fires of the Confederate army, then stretching northward beyond Piper's and swerved near the Dunker church; further off, the heights where a great battle was soon to be fought, the inner pickets of the Confederate host were nearly to the course she was pursuing.

She seemed to have a thorough knowledge of her route to avoid the sentries, for soon she neared the grim trees and urged the horse into their depths.

Scarcely had she gone a dozen yards when a low, signaling whistle arrested her.

"Fussee?" she called, checking on the rein.

"Here."

Forward from the almost impenetrable shade came the figure of a man

"I am pursued. Act quickly; what shall we do?"

"Dismount!" said the man. "There are not many. We can receive them. Out with your revolver, and use it when they are close."

On plunged the horsemen.

Captain Sorrel had straitened to his utmost to overtake the fugitive ere she could reach the shelter of the woods, and he was well mounted, for, by the time the girl had dismounted, he and his men were at the edge of the trees.

"On, boys!" they heard him shout. "She is in here; four of you make around and cross the road and get to the back of the woods. She is aiming for the pike."

Satisfied that he was on the track of a spy, Sorrel gave these orders; for not yet had the brigades of Early and Jackson reached their assigned positions on the left, and a bold dash might readily carry her safely across or around to the ford at Pry's mill.

But the girl and the man, in the silent depths, awaited Captain Sorrel, to receive him in a manner that was to be a huge surprise.

"Is it safe to use our weapons?" asked the girl. "Will the noise not be apt to bring down upon us a force larger than this one before us?"

"I think not. Ready! Here they come!"

Sorrel, followed by six rangers—four having started immediately to obey the order for the interception of the female spy—rapidly entered the double gloom of foliage and night.

"Now!" whispered the man in ambush, to the girl at his side.

From their covert, the forms of the rangers were plainly outlined against the sky beyond.

Suddenly there broke the snappy crack of revolvers and the whistle of bullets cutting the leaves.

The unexpected volley had the effect of checking the advancing rangers. Few men, however brave, care to face an enemy they cannot see, and whose marksmanship is made manifest to deadliness. All halted, and while one of the wounded men on the ground set up a series of painful moans, the others seemed inclined to retreat.

"Forward, I say!" commanded Sorrell

A curse was upon the ranger captain's lips when again the revolvers barked, and the second discharge revealing that there was a foe more than the pursued girl within the impervious darkness, Sorrell also appeared to suddenly think that it would be better to get out of the predicament.

Withdrawing a short distance he disposed of his men in singles over a semi-circle which commanded the whole of that side where the spy had entered, and riding to and fro from his improvised posts, he waited doggedly for daylight which was yet many hours distant.

"You had better take the information I can give you," said the girl to her companion, and her voice was that of one who must have been accustomed to danger, so even was it in the moment of this trying adventure. "It is important, and it matters nothing about me. I have been in worse scrapes than this since McClellan left Frederick, and I've always come out all right, haven't I, you dear old Foose?"

"Bless your bright eyes, yes, you have; but I sometimes fear I do a great sin when I let you dash into the dangers you do."

"Don't worry. There, now, while those fellows are waiting for us to come out into their clutches listen to the news and be off with it. I know pretty much the whole programme for receiving McClellan. I was all through Longstreet's corps-to-day disguised as an old negro woman with home-made pies; but the news. The bridges are already garrisoned strongly. Only the furthest one north will afford an easy crossing. Hill will be on the right. Hood is now posting on the left. The place to attack is on the left. Altogether, there are not over forty thousand men in line. That is all."

"Good-by, then, my bonny Belle," and with the words, the man glided like a specter from her side.

When alone she performed something that showed she was prepared for just such emergencies as the one in which she now found herself. From a capacious pocket she drew forth four square and ample pieces of cloth provided with buckles and extra twine. In a few minutes she had muffled the hoofs of her horse, and then slowly began to move from the spot, making no betrayal noise as she went.

And her companion had called her "Belle."

It surely seemed that the bold Captain Striker was right in charging her with being a spy.

## CHAPTER VI.

### OLD FUSEE.

On this night of the fifteenth of September the Union army was fast distributing into its position for the coming battle, as well in the darkness as in the light of the late afternoon on which it had arrived at the east bank of Antietam creek.

At his headquarters the great general was planning his method of attack with counselors both wise and impetuous.

A night not to be soon forgotten by those who survive to-day the solemn moments there at Fry's mill.

But McClellan, though admirably informed so far of the enemy's movements, was then waiting for something of which his brave officers knew nothing; and there were those who attributed his humor to that same spirit which may have designated fatal slowness in the army he led.

The famous strategist, however, knew what he was about.

The night was far gone when an aide appeared and saluted, with the information that some one had demanded an audience.

Those who stood near saw a sudden light overspread their commander's countenance, while he answered, quickly:

"Bring him to me at once."

A strange looking individual it was that entered.

A man with a visage that bore the scars of battles in the distant past.

There was but little of his face visible, because of a wonderful beard that grew nearly up into his eyes; but on his brow and nose, and even the eyelids, were marks as from steel slashings.

Tanned to iron-like darkness, broad shouldered, hands hairy and hard, with livid scars on the palms and backs—it required no second glance to see in him a veteran who had faced the shock of war in other times than the now active struggle for the Union.

Though surely more than seventy years of age, it would appear as if nature had formed a knotty monument of endurance in his frame, only; hewing her seamy ravages of time in the long, snow-white locks dangling from his head and bushing from his jaws. His eyes were keen—perhaps keener—than those of younger years; and his figure, as he stood before his general, had no supine bend, but reared with the long trained straightness of the soldier.

His attire, while of the Union blue, was almost without regulation in its make up, and the hat, which he dropped at his feet as he saluted, was a battered specimen of an army slouch that might have been excellent in other days.

Such was Old Fusee, the gunner.

Such in appearance, and his fame as a marksman was known in many battles since the notorious defeat of McDowell at Bull Run. At this time, he was known to belong with Weaver's artillery, then stationed between headquarters and the turnpike bridge, but seldom, except in an engagement, was he to be seen with the battery, and few there were who knew the valuable service which caused his absence.

As if expecting to receive something from the corner, McClellan held out one hand.

Fusee advanced, taking from an inner pocket a folded paper.

"The 'ar, gen'ral," he said, handing over the paper, "is a map of the Johnnys as it war to-day—I reckon to-day, coz I got it late last night. Hood's moving to the Confed'rate left; Hill's droppin' down tow'rd the 'Tomas, an' all the bridges, 'cept one, is ready to blaze hell Columbia into you if you try to pass 'em."

"Except one, you say?"

"This very one up here—the most north'ard. The rebs hev no north' forty thousand men to fight agin you. But the best way to attack is from the north. An' that, gen'ral, with what they ar' map will tell you, is all the news I've got."

Eagerly opening the rough map brought to him by the veteran who was evidently an experienced spy, McClellan dismissed him with one of those compliments which he ever paid to bravery and faithfulness—a few words, no more, such as made him dear then and remembered now among the boys in blue who fought in the Army of the Potomac.

Old Fusee sought his battery at its stand near the Keedysville pike, and as he appeared among his comrades, after reporting, he was greeted by a shout that told full well his vast popularity.

When at last he could release himself from the gripping hands that would fairly have embraced him, he threw himself down on a little knoll on the ridge, his face toward the Confederate lines on the other side of the Antietam.

No blanket or covering needed he. He was a child of war whose bones had absorbed the dew on many a camp and battlefield, who had fought and fell nigh wounded unto death on that famous field of Waterloo, when the allies thundered the fate of Bonaparte. He was but little more than a youth then, but he had held dear to heart the memory of the terrible day when he had cast aside his drum and snatched up the colors from a fallen standard bearer, and in his childish hands bore it amid the shouts of strong men dropping dead as they cheered beneath the avalanche of Welington.

Old Fusee had no letters to read; his prayers were said; only an old, scared veteran he seemed, with no one to weep if he should fall, no one to miss him out of the world's mass of men. But had some one crept near to him as he lay sleeping there, he might have been heard to murmur something in the dreams that were his—a name which issued from his lips with a tenderness that told his fast withering heart was not desolate, some one was very dear to him somewhere on the face of the earth; and the name he unconsciously uttered was:

"Belle, Belle! my bonny, bonny Belle! Bless your bright eyes, my bonny Belle!"

Short seems the sleep of the soldier who lays his arm in expectancy of the dread battle on the morrow.

Boom!

A gun roused every sleeping eye in the army that had dared to sleep.

The morning had dawned.

The morning of the sixteenth; and men girded themselves and clinched their teeth in contemplation of what was to come.

At his own favorite gun stood Old Fusee, first of all to obey the bugle call.

The Confederate batteries on the west of the Antietam had sent an early reminder that they were there.

Promptly were their guns answered by the boys in blue.

Ere long there raged a very duel between the batteries, and Old Fusee appeared to be in his element when came the order to open fire on the enemy.

Stripped to the waist, his broad chest heaved up in great knots the muscles which had been but hinted at in his loose blouse; though grim was his war-worn visage, a smile, which others saw, and which sent a thrill of enthusiasm to the breasts of those who



saw, played around his mouth, and his actions were as calm and trained as if at some mere play amid the shrieking shot overhead and around.

From Weaver's battery came the shots that told most heavily on the hosts on the opposite shore. Yet it was soon manifest that the Yankee gunners were far superior, in all their artillery delivery, to the graycoats.

The battle was not to open yet, however.

Acting on the information he had received from Old Fuses and from other quartermen, McClellan was concentrating his forces at those points whence he would hurl himself upon the stubborn lines across the Antietam.

Hooker was moving to the north, having crossed the bridge.

Burnside, at the south, was to await the order which, when the battle fairly opened, would result in carrying the Sharpsburg crest and out off Lee's retreat toward Shepherdstown.

Crests and ridges, valleys and roads, in that early morning, were swarming with the opposing hosts that would soon come together in the mighty clash of conflict.

Still boomed the guns of the dueling artillerists.

Marched and counter-marched the brigades maneuvering for position.

The bugles blew their shrill blasts, the drums beating and colors of North and South, proudly borne by the glittering ranks, were floating defiantly on the air.

Strange and startling echoes, these, in those picturesque sights, where ere long the blood of brave men was to dye the sod in slippery streams.

The atmosphere was gradually becoming as if compressed in sympathetic readiness for the terrific explosion.

#### CHAPTER VII. THE MYSTERIOUS NOTE.

As James Bartholemew strode backward and forward in his parlor, in that excitement produced by the mysterious missive which he had found upon the center table, he was presently brought to an abrupt halt by one of the most remarkable occurrences in his life.

In the doorway stood Belle Bartholemew.

And he had seen her, within a few minutes, speeding far away toward the hills, pursued by the rangers of Captain Sorrel.

The young girl's face was unusually pale; in her dark, lustrous eyes there was a singular, a sort of anxious expression.

"Belle!"

"Well, Uncle Jim?"

"Why, how the dogs—where did you come from?"

"Come from! I haven't been anywhere."

"You haven't! Did you not just now start off again on Diamond, in a wild race, with a lot of mounted men after you?"

"Does it seem so?"

She looked at him with a degree of surprise.

But he marked her pale features—features that he had never before known to be other than rosy with buoyant spirits or the excitement of exercise.

"What has happened, girl?"

"Nothing."

"Where were you last night?"

Now she raised her glorious head, and the wonted light came into her eyes as she answered promptly, half defiantly:

"With Frank Carlton."

"What?"

He fairly glared upon her.

"You were with that accursed Yankee!—that man to whom I declared you were never to speak again."

"There, uncle," with some of her usual lightness of spirit, which ever met him in his moods of anger, "that was a long while ago, at the breaking out of the war. I thought, too, that it would be an easy matter for me to obey your commands regarding him, as he went over to the side we both abhor. But, ah, me! it is a severe thing to love," she concluded, with a heavy sigh.

"Love, forsooth!" he fumed.

"And when I heard from him, that he was in this vicinity, I could not resist his appeal for an interview. Yes, I met him last night."

"Where?" with fierce suddenness.

Then, as she did not at once answer, he continued:

"I can tell you where you trusted with this lover whom you should hate rather than love. It was at the Potomac ford. And I begin to see that you are more than a mere sweetheart; you and he are spies in the midst of the army now in Sharpsburg. You gave him papers of some kind last night. You are conveying information to the enemy. And"—with increasing rage—"and you are no ward of mine. There! I've said it. I ought to have said it long ago, before you brought this disgrace upon us. I will not have a traitor about me! I'll disown you! I'll clear you out!"

and he paced back and forth again, as he had been doing when she entered, flitting his coat-tails up and down, puffing out his attenuated cheeks, rolling his ratty eyes anon upon her in the glances of a man almost speechless with fury.

"Uncle Jim, part of your language I do not understand. But you, yourself, have taught me the spirit of independence which I think I possess, and I shall take you at your word. You shall not be burdened with one who is, as you declare, a disgrace to you. You need not clear me out. I will go. But what do you mean by saying that I met Frank Carlton at the ford? I was nowhere near there."

"Oh, you were not?"

"Positively, no. Ah!" in a sudden remembrance, "I see, this contemptible idiot, Captain Striker, said something about seeing us there, too. I am at a loss to comprehend, honestly, Uncle Jim. I tell you I have not been near the ford for nearly a week."

"Umph!"

He turned short around and left her.

Alone, Belle pressed her hands to her temples like one in the pain of some deep worryment.

"What can it all mean?" she murmured, lowly, "Who could have been this strange girl I met at the stable, whose face I could not make out in the darkness, and who begged me to aid in her flight from a band of men who, she said, were in pursuit of her? What is this tale about my being at the ford and handling papers to a man supposed to be a Union spy? I am suspected of disloyalty to the South—my own sweet, sunny South! I am in a maze to-night. And Uncle Jim never spoke to me so harshly before. Does he mean what he has said? Oh, no! I cannot think it. I will wait until to-morrow, and if he is still angry, then I will leave him forever. He has been very kind to me since I was but a babe—a babe I was when he became my guardian, he says, it will cost me a struggle to leave him, but I will—I will—"

"Miss Belle?"

A negro girl was standing in the doorway. This was Pomp's sister.

"What is it, Topsy?" recovering herself to conceal from the girl that there was aught amiss.

"I 'se afraid de paper you gin me fo' to lay on de table has bro't trouble 'twixt you an' Massa James."

"Paper, Topsy? What paper?"

"Why de paper wot you gin me out by de stable fo' to put on dat yere table whar Massa James mus' boun' to fin' hit."

"I did not give you any paper."

"Sho, chile! an' hyar's de go' piece wot you gin me too. You's forget hit mighty quick, Miss Belle."

"You must be dreaming, Topsy."

"Sho! You gin me a fo' up paper, an' say, 'Top, take dis an' lay on de table whar Massa James sure fo' to fin' hit, an' hyar's a dollar.' I one dotee hit. Den I waches fo' to see if he gotten hit. Sure 'nuff, he gotten hit, an' den—de good Lawd! he's act j-s' sif he war scared a nigh to deaf. An' den I couldn't help hit, Miss Belle—I jes' heerd you an' he's spat'in' in hyar, an' so I 'se afraid I hadn't oughter done hit."

Belle saw that it was useless to argue the point. Topsy was positive; and Belle knew that she had not seen the girl when she had gone to the stable—though she had seen some one else, as may be judged by her perplexed murmurings.

"Have it your way, Topsy. Bring me some wine; I cannot touch the wine that Captain Striker has drank of."

A little shudder of repugnance for the man, and thoughts of the man passed over her.

The girl departed, leaving her young mistress in another vein of wonderment.

"Could it have been the person I saw at the stable—the stranger who was pursued, she said, by mounted men—who paid Topsy to perform this errand? What kind of errand could it have been, to cause Uncle Jim to look 'scaered nigh to death? I—"

She paused in her self-questioning as her glance fell upon a slip of paper on the carpet.

It was the mysterious missive.

In his rage, as he flitted his coat tails up and down, Bartholemew had unknowingly jerked out the significant communication which contained a menace from a dreaded source.

Leaning forward, she picked it up.

The next minute she was reading the lines scribbled there.

"This must be the note Topsy alludes to! Uncle Jim threatened?—by a party named Fane Fusor—"

Topsy's returning footsteps caused her to slip the scrawl out of sight in her pocket.

Hastily swallowing a small quantity of the wine, she hurried up stairs to her bedroom, to read again the remarkable epistle and rack her brain for some solution of its meaning.

And scarcely had she disappeared, when Bartholemew re-entered the parlor, casting anxious glances about the floor. He had missed the paper.

“Traucherous paper!—for it contained a hint at some crooked deed in the past of the rich bachelor which it would not be well for him to let the world know at that day in Belle’s life.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CAPTURING A BRAVE GIRL.

She, whom we left in the woods through which ran the sunken road to the northwest of Sharpsburg, could not be aware of the picket-like cordon that Captain Sorrel had placed along the front of the thicket, nor of the four rangers who had been dispatched to intercept her should she emerge at the opposite side of her shelter, though the order to the latter had been loudly spoken, the noise of the horses’ hoofs and the snarling cries of the men to their panting beasts had rendered his words unintelligible to the two in ambush.

We have seen that this girl must be a spy, and, being such, she knew that Stuart and the artillery had not reached the position intended for them near the higher branch and on the same sunken road she now followed.

The girl, at the moment the reader first saw her, was making the effort to return to the Federal lines, having accomplished all that could have been expected of her before the opening of the fierce battle which was to come.

Many miles had she to go over before the necessary detour could be made; for, unlike the man whom she had met in the woods, who, in male attire, and bolder and stronger than she, could pass dangers that would have been impossible for her to surmount, she was wise to seek avoidance of any exposure that might result in her capture.

She knew, too, by the fact of the recent hot pursuit, that she was fully suspected as a spy, and to be caught meant death to her, girl though she was.

When she reached the thinner portion of the wood, she paused. All was still, save the distant sounds of muffled and rumbling that told of the Confederate army moving through the darkness to stretch its wings in readiness for the morrow—all still save the occasional note of some huge night bird that soared away from the hawoo its keen scent detected in the approaching dawn.

“I think I will venture it,” she muttered, straining her eyes searchingly around. “A dash through the hills, with the animal’s feet muffled may not be observed, and once over the upper branch I shall be comparatively safe. Yes, I think I will venture it.”

Throwing the bridle over the head of the beast, she sprang into the saddle with the agility of an experienced trooper.

“Now, then, come, my good fellow, you and I are strangers, but I have seen your mettle. So, away we go—away for McClellan and freedom!”

But, though the pause and the searching gaze into her surrounding had satisfied her that there was no one near, she had men to deal with in the rangers of Captain Sorrel, who were born and bred in that mountainous region, and whose cunning at woodcraft was of no mean order.

She did not see the spectral figure of a horseman, scarcely ten feet ahead, motionless in an admirably screening shadow, and this horseman had discerned her approach at the moment she emerged in the thinner portion of the woods.

Immovable he sat in his saddle, though he could scarcely suppress a cry of triumph as he comprehended that the skulker advancing could be no other than the female spy they were after.

It was the lastman of the cordon stretched out by Captain Sorrel. Had she pursued her stealthy course but a few rods further she must have eluded his vigilant eyes.

The bridle was tightened in her grasp, her dainty boot had touched the side of her horse as she uttered the onward word, and the animal had taken a quick leap forward, when she was halted in a manner to startle even a braver girl than she.

A loud, a triumphant guffaw broke the stillness of the surrounding, and out of the gloom into the tangled path rode a man on a colossal beast.

“Halt, there, or I’ll drop you with a bullet!” challenged a deep, coarse voice.

Following the command, the man drew and fired a revolver in the air, the signal agreed upon between Captain Sorrel and his men to indicate the discovery of the girl if she was discovered. Promptly was this signal answered by a hail from the next ranger below; and then another hail.

Instantly she drew from her bosom a revolver, and quite unexpectedly to the exulting ranger there was a loud bang, a flash of flame and a bullet cut through his arm, wringing from his ruffian lips a yell of pain and anger.

“Ho, you cent of the hills! you’ve shot me!”

No time was given him to utter more.

The resolute girl was upon him with weapon leveled for another shot, and hard dug her heel into the flank of her horse, as she boldly charged the man who sought her capture.

Though wounded, the man did not flinch.

Together came the horses of the two with a grinding shock.

The revolver cracked again, but its explosion this time was due to the collision, and the bullet whistled harmlessly past his head.

“Oh, you are a cat with sharp claws, too!” he blurted, leaning dextrously forward and grasping the wrist that was raising for still another shot, while with his other hand he laid hold upon the girl’s bridle by the bit.

“But I think you are caught at last, my gay and pretty spy! Hold, now, no more bullets, I reckon, from that barker of yours!” and by a fierce wrench he deprived her of the weapon, flinging it to the ground.

In a few seconds she would be a prisoner.

Freeing her arm from his painful hold, she snatched from her bosom a singular contrivance of tin about two inches long and of a double flatness. This she inserted in her mouth.

The ruffian regained his grasp on the girl’s arm, but as he did so something transpired to bring a howl of agony from him.

Bending close, while she continued her brave struggle, he felt a strong blown breath in his face, and simultaneously it seemed to him as if all the fires of the lower regions had been puffed at once into his defenceless eyes.

A hot, penetrating, terrible power had been injected into his wide orbs with the breath, causing him to release her, clap both hands to his face, and roar forth a wild oath.

“My soul! Oh, my eyes! I am blind. You eat; you have put out my eyes!”

Freed from his hold, she urged on her horse, for there was not a moment to lose.

Nor had she, until she cried to the rearing animal, uttered a word during the struggle which she felt was for her very life.

But too long had that encounter lasted.

Ere the daring girl could extricate herself from the bushes that angled round her horse’s feet, she was surrounded by the rangers. The voice of Captain Sorrel broke forth jubilantly:

“Soho, we have you, eh my pretty! Surrender, surrender, I say, or we’ll have to lay you out with bullets.”

The girl saw that it would be useless to resist now. To defy the fate which encompassed her might only result in her speedy death, for well she knew the reckless venom of those who were figuring as rangers and free riders in the Confederate host.

“I surrender,” she replied, simply. “What do you wish me to do?”

“Dismount! Get off that horse,” ordered Sorrel.

She obeyed.

“Have you any weapons?” he demanded, having heard enough shots to convince him that she must be armed.

“No.”

“You were armed?”

“I lost my weapon in the fight with this wretch——”

“Wretch, you call me,” whiningly snarled the fellow, who, having dropped from his horse, was stamping about and blubbering dolefully while he rubbed his inflamed and burning eyes, only to increase their agony. “Wretch you call me! By my soul! if I could see, and if I had my revolver, I would blow your wildcat brains out! Oh, my eyes!”

Sorrel leaped to the ground and advanced toward his captive.

## CHAPTER IX.

### BULLETS OF RESCUE.

Raising his broad, sombrero-like hat in a bow that savored of mockery, the ranger captain said:

“Well, Miss Belle, you have led us a hard chase.”

“How do you know that my name is Belle?”

“How?” surprisedly. “Oh, come, you are in a good humor if you are a prisoner. True, I have never had the pleasure of your actual acquaintance, but then everybody well knows the dashing Miss Belle Bartholemew.”

“My name is not Belle Bartholemew.”

The man with the burning and blinding eyes, for whose relief his comrades were exerting at the moment, broke in here with a snort and an oath.

“Belle Bartholemew, or Belle Anybodyelse,” he half roared. “Put a bullet through the she-cat spy! My eyes are out! She has blinded me for life.”

“Silence, there!” commanded Sorrel.

He struck a match and held it near the face of his prisoner.

The survey he took of her seemed to settle her identity in his mind.

“As I said, I do not know you as an acquaintance, my bold spy rider in petticoats, but I have seen you before now, and I know you to be Belle Bartholemew.”

“And I tell you that you are entirely wrong. My name is Belle Fusor.”



"No matter. Come, now, will you be a quiet captive? or shall we have to bind those pretty arms of yours?"

"No need to bind me, sir; I will go with you."

"You can't hoodwink me. Come, mount your horse again; I'll help you up—"

The girl disregarded his stirring hand extended, and with an exhibition that showed she possessed muscle as well as beauty, and which caused the glances of the rangers to rest upon her with admiration, she reached her seat in the saddle at a single spring.

Ever alert for danger in her capacity as a spy, long practice had acquired the habit of hasty mounting with an astonishing ease.

"Lead on, sir," she said, coolly.

"Mount!" ordered Sorrel to his men.

"What!" came snarling and angry from the man with the blinded eyes; "you are not going to kill her?"

"Lead that fellow to his horse, and lead his horse, too, if he is blind, as he says he is," Sorrel instructed the ranger nearest to his side.

The little cavalcade was about to move forward when there happened a strange interruption.

Suddenly out of the thicket before them flashed a succession of flames and—

Bang—bang! came shots from what seemed to be a half dozen revolvers.

Two saddles were emptied, and the horses, startled by the unexpected fusillade, uttered frightened snorts, pitching backward, then forward, then plunged away at a gallop.

Bang—bang! again the shots.

The rangers were thrown into a complete panic.

It was the second time they had been met by an ambush; a second time they had seen comrades go down before the fire of a foe that was invincible.

"Steady!" hollered Captain Sorrel, his hand hard on the bridle of his horse as it reared among the other crowding animals. "Stand! Charge those bushes ahead! Rout out this—"

His commands were utterly unheeded. No comrades were the rough rangers; but it was no pleasant predicament to find themselves being shot down thus without a chance to retaliate upon their foe.

For a few seconds there was a confusion of men and horses, and then one and all dashed away from the edge of the woods, while the revolver, or revolvers, they paused not to consider which, continued to bang—bang! in their rear.

The girl found herself deserted by those who a moment before were her stern captors.

Almost at her feet lay the two men who had fallen from their saddles, apparently dead.

When the receding sound of the flying rangers told that their departure was assured, she was not surprised to hear a voice addressing her from the gloom ahead.

"Come forward, miss; you have nothing to fear now."

It was a rich, manly voice that would have inspired confidence under any circumstances.

Without any hesitation she obeyed the request.

A man stepped out in front of her.

"Gave them quite a scare, didn't I?" he said, cheerily.

"You?"

"Yes. But I am afraid it has left me an unarmed man, for I have no extra cartridges with me, and my revolvers are empty to a shot. But who are you, miss?"

"As you see, a young girl who was in a very tight place," she answered, warily.

"And as those fellows were Johnnies, f take it that you are a Union girl—and a brave one at that, from what I was in time to witness. Have no fear of me, miss; I am a Federal soldier—Major Frank Carlton, at your service."

She could see, even in the uncertain shadows, that he wore a suit of gray—not a military suit, but more like the garb of a young farmer.

"Why did you rescue me from those men who wear the same colors as yourself?"

"Oh, you mean the gray? Ha, ha, ha! you must not judge by looks. I told you I was a Federal soldier—and so I am. Major Frank Carlton, of the Pennsylvania Reserves, with Hooker's corps. Pray, tell me who I have had the honor of rescuing from that band of Confederates? Or, better, with your permission, I will look."

He drew a patent fuse from his pocket and presently held its smoky light near enough to scrutinize her features.

As he did so, an exclamation of supreme astonishment burst from him, and he snapped the fuse shut suddenly.

"Belle! You here—and in such danger!"

"Yes, my name is Belle. But how do you know me?"

"How do I know you," he repeated, in the tone of one overcome by a redoubled amazement at such an inquiry. "Ah, I thought I knew your voice, but was not sure. My dear, darling Belle, for

Heaven's sake explain how you came to be in such a plight, when I thought you safe at home?"

"Stop, sir, please," she interrupted. "There is some mistake. My name is Belle; but I am not the Belle you take me to be, evidently. I never met you before."

"Belle! This from you? And only last night, when we met again, after a separation of years, you told me you had been true to our lovers' vows in the past, and that you would be mine in the future forever, if I survived the war? What do you mean by this? Have you changed in so short a time as a few hours?"

"Major Carlton, those rangers from whom you rescued me believed me to be a young lady named Belle Bartholomew. Do you too, think that I am she?"

Again, and hastily, the major lighted his fuse, taking a second glance at a face which the tiny spark revealed to be very beautiful. Then he drew back and uttered, half regretfully:

"I see—I am mistaken, but the likeness is truly wonderful and would deceive most anyone but me. Yet you say your name is Belle?"

"Yes, Belle Fusor. Who is Belle Bartholomew?"

"My promised bride, if I survive this struggle between the states. Her home is a large stone house on the Shepherdstown road. I risked my life to see her, when the army of McClellan marched into this locality, and thank Heaven! I found a true heart ready to renew the vows I had feared were broken long ago, never to be revived."

Within her silent mind the girl was musing:

"The stone house on the Shepherdstown road. That is the home Old Fusee said I must seek before returning to the Federal lines, and find means to convey a certain note to the master of the dwelling, which I did by bribing a negro girl. Then it is the home of Belle Bartholomew, this young lady whom I so greatly resemble? And no doubt it was she who, when I appealed to her to aid in my escape from the pursuing rangers, gave me her own horse cheerfully and bade me fly. A noble, generous girl; and I am proud to be mistaken for such a one!"

At that juncture the major rested his hand warily upon her arm.

## CHAPTER X.

### STRIKER MAKES A CAPTURE

This action of the girl's rescuer was caused by a significant sound which both heard distinctly, and near.

The snapping of a twig, accompanied by a noise like the shuffle of a foot amid the brush in a slip.

"There is still some one in the woods near us," he whispered, to his companion.

"One, or more, of the rangers from whom I have been delivered," she suggested, in an equally guarded accent.

"No; I hardly think so."

For many minutes they remained silent and motionless, listening, but there was no repetition of the suspicious sound.

"You heard it?" he queried.

"Yes."

"But perhaps we are needlessly alarmed. It may have been some small game prowling through the night. At any rate, let us take the chances. Where do you wish to go?"

"I seek the Federal lines."

"And so do I. Suppose we move on?"

The next minute he said, as he walked along by the side of her horse:

"Ah, you have your animal blanket shod?"

"Yes."

But the girl was not one to betray, even to this man who proclaimed himself to be a Union officer, the hazardous business which brought her into that vicinity.

They followed the west side of the sunken road, winding cautiously amid the timber that became less dense as it stretched northward; and it seemed that nothing was to molest them on the stealthy journey of detour, meant to bring them eventually into the Union lines.

By sound more than by sight, they were apprised of the approach on their right of lumbering artillery and cavalry, which, she informed him, must be Stuart, judging by certain information she had gathered during the day.

Therefore, they diverged further to the left, away from the advancing body they could not see.

"I strongly suspect that you have been playing the perilous part of a spy within the Confederate lines," he said.

"Why do you think so?"

"You seem to be posted in regard to their movements."

If she had contemplated any reply to this remark, it was prevented by an occurrence just then of a startling nature.

Without warning, like a gliding specter, a man of discernibly bulky form stepped out of the shadows in front of them, and even

In the semi-darkness they could see the gleam of a pair of revolvers which, extended in both hands, he held completely covering them.

And, simultaneously, the voice of Captain Jack Striker, harshly: "Halt, you infernal Yankee spies, both of you!"

Major Carlton had, as he said, entirely emptied his revolvers in his bold deed of rescuing the girl from the rangers.

Her weariness, we have seen, was lost in her struggle with the first ranger who disputed her progress when striving to escape from the cordon of Captain Sorrel.

Both unarmed, and though but a single man confronted them, what was to be done, with those gleaming, deadly barrels leveled upon them, and behind the barrels a rabid graycoat who, perhaps, would really rather kill than capture.

"Hol' on! Hol' your fire, mister man!" responded Carlton, with, out a second's hesitation, and in a voice so completely unlike his natural manner of speech that the girl was hugely surprised; and he hurriedly said to her, so low that the party in front could not possibly have heard: "Make a dash for it, miss. You are mounted and may escape. He may not be able to hit you in the darkness; at any rate, liberty is worth trying for."

"Come, do you surrender? or shall I open fire? Hello, there! halt! halt! I say! Curse you!"

For the girl at that instant performed an astonishing feat.

By a quick and steady pull she swerved her horse half around and struck hard with her heel in his flank.

With a snort the animal took a leap, a leap that saved its rider from the bullet that came promptly whistling after her, and in a second, horse and rider had vanished.

The desperate plunge was over an embankment that rose by the sunken road at that point.

Carlton stood transfixed, gazing at the spot where she had disappeared, and his soul was filled with admiration.

"I've got you safe enough, anyhow!" ground an unpleasant voice in his ears, as a heavy hand gripped down on his shoulder.

"Say, mister man, don't you go for to hurt me that way. Well, I sven to 'scats, if you ain't most skeered my sister outen her seven wits!"

"Who was that girl?"

"Why, she war my sister."

"Who are you?" sharply.

"Me? Why, I'm been a grubbin' over in the hills yender for some folks. I come from Shepherdstown, that's whar I belong at, an' that's whar I'm makin' for; cause I 'lowed there'd soon be canyun balls enough over whar I was workin' at the plow an' grub all 'at was wanted. Say, you're a ossifer, ain't you, now?"

The tall form of Captain Striker bent forward that he might peer closer into the face of the speaker.

The manner and speech were those of a young farmer, truly, and the suit of homespun gray was very deceptive.

But it would appear as if fate was dead against the Federal major in his masquerade, for the Confederate captain made a discovery.

The suit of gray was merely drawn over the regimental garb of blue—carefully to perfection, Carlton thought; and as Striker searched the face and then scanned the dress of the man, he detected that there was another suit beneath.

At one stroug grip and pull he tore away the coat at the collar, and, lo! blue coat and brass buttons were revealed.

"Ha! I suspected as much——"

He had no time to utter more than this.

Slug! came the fist of Carlton in his face, and the blood spurted from his nose in a stream.

"Curse you, you Yankee dog!"

"A Yankee, but no dog!" retorted the Unionist.

Then there was the combined breath of two men coming together in the clinch of a deadly struggle for the mastery.

The blow had jarred both pistols from Striker's hands; and had he not been so very large and heavy, and had not the darkness rendered the blow a little uncertain, Carlton would have surely downed him by that unexpected stroke of his fist.

Fiercely they fought.

As they fought, Carlton realized that the Confederate must be alone, else there would have come assistance to him now.

Backward and forward they swayed, squirmed, twisted; round and about they tore the sod with their crunching heels.

But the powerful captain was more than a match for his young adversary.

Twice, thrice he freed one muscular arm, and with the fist of the arm he rained blows upon the Unionist's head, until at last Carlton felt his senses reeling.

Still, manfully, he fought.

Still, at intervals, fell the terrible blows that were gradually depriving him of strength and consciousness.

"You infernal Yankee!" panted Striker, seeing that he would soon conquer, "I will soon have you a prisoner. Then look out!

We've a platoon of guns to riddle the bodies of all such spies as you! Now then——" and with the sentence uncompleted, again he found opportunity to deal those terrific blows that were overcoming his ganey antagonist.

Suddenly, Carlton, blinded with his own blood, ceased his stubborn resistance, and sunk with a groan helpless at the feet of hard-breathing Captain Striker.

"Soho? I have pounded him to a jelly, have I? Good. But I hope I have not killed him."

With a singular anxiety under the circumstances he knelt to examine the unconscious form of his enemy for some signs of life.

"I hope I have not killed him," he repeated, as he knelt by the Union major's side and placed one of his broad palms over the fallen man's heart. "I prefer to take him alive, a prisoner. Hol but I will take him first to the house of old James Bartholomew, and I will say to him: 'Behold! here is the fellow with whom your ward, the dashing Miss Belle, is leagued, to give information to the infernal Yankees. Yes, I will do that first; and after that I will take him to headquarters—for no doubt I shall find something on his person to confirm the fact that he, as well as she, is a spy. 'Sfames! spy or not, I shall see to it that he never gets back to his detestable Union lines again, be sure of that. Now come, it will be no child's task to carry the carrion back to where I left my horse."

But it was his intention to pull the major back to the animal and transport him into a captivity that meant death; and with a strained grunt, he first lifted the limp figure, then swung it over his shoulder like a sack.

So intent was he with his captive that he wholly forgot his brace of pistols—knocked from his grasp, we have said, by a smart blow from Carlton. They were left lying there in the little open, their rich mounting gleaming dully amid the grass.

When starting to join the pursuit, he had not stopped to remove the halter from the horse—a patent rope halter that now served him admirably.

For when he reached the tethered animal, he removed the halter, and with a sharp knife, proceeded to cut it apart until he had formed pieces sufficient to bind the young major's arms behind his back and his lower limbs at the ankles securely.

Within a few minutes after Captain Striker had departed from the spot where he had captured Frank Carlton, a figure came noiselessly from the bushes and ran forward.

It was Belle Fusor.

Not far did she go before checking her horse and dismounting. Searching about, she, fortunately, was not long in finding a stout stick which would make a formidable club.

With this in hand, she climbed up the bank and retraced her course toward where she had left her rescuer menaced by the revolvers of their common foe.

The time lost in searching for the club, however, had sufficed for Striker to overcome and carry off the major.

But the brave girl, as she emerged upon the spot, determined to lend every assistance in her power, caught sight of something instantly which gave her heart a thrill of delight.

There in the grass, almost at her feet, were the polished revolvers!

Scarcely able to repress a low cry at the discovery, she grasped them up, and at full speed hastened back to her horse.

Once more armed, and intent upon standing bravely by the man to whom she owed her present liberty, she was presently galloping in hot pursuit of the Confederate captain; and muffled as were the hoofs of the horse, and soft as was the sod she traversed, Striker was unapprised, by sound, of any one being on his track.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A DOOMED PRISONER.

Here again fate seemed to be against the young major.

At last the captain heard the thud of deadened hoofs in his rear, and though not dreaming that it could be the dashing female rider whom he stoutly believed to be Belle Bartholomew—who had taken the bold leap over the embankment, he turned slightly to the left, toward Sharpsburg, intending to avoid whoever it might be, and reach the house of Bartholomew from the direction of his own regiment, part of which was then thrown across the Shepherdstown road.

And because of this prompt movement, and the silence with which he moved his horse at a walk, on the soft soil at the side of the road, Belle Fusor was deceived and dashed on without discovering the ruse.

As he neared the dwelling, Captain Striker saw what had not been in the vicinity—the immediate vicinity—when he had left there.

South of the Shepherdstown road, and far westward, were the fires of the Confederate forces who were coming in, the remainder of them from Harper's Ferry.

Thousands of men, ready in arms were there, encompassing the surrounding of Bartholomew's house.

Within the house of the fiery secessionist were a number of officers partaking of the old gentleman's hospitality.

"It will hardly suit my plans," he muttered, biting his mustache, as he paused without to gaze upon the feast of wine and other refreshments progressing within. "It will hardly suit my plans in regard to this Yank and Miss Belle, to take my captive right in among them. I must get the old man to himself and have him place this prisoner in a strong room, while I have another little interview with him and Miss Belle."

Dismounting and swinging his still insensible burden over one shoulder, he made his way to a side entrance that opened upon a sort of veranda.

James Bartholomew appeared to be making merry with his gray uniformed company, and seemed to have banished the uneasiness, even terror, occasioned by the note we have seen him receive shortly before—he was suddenly surprised to see Captain Striker stalk unceremoniously in among them.

To one or two of the assembled Confederates, Striker was known, and his appearance was greeted cordially.

With a politeness that was part of his character when in such surroundings—very unlike his even coarse way when in such scenes as those in the woods shortly previous—he took time to partake of a glass of wine and exchange a few words of pleasantry with his brothers in arms.

Bartholomew observed the capt. in's piercing black eyes on him angularly, that there was a dangerous smile under the heavy mustache betokening a pending something more than usually sinister.

"I am afraid of Captain Striker," half groaned the old gentleman, inwardly. "He has something to say to me—I can plainly see that. What is it? What has he come back here for?"

His mental questioning was soon to be answered.

Presently, at a sign from Striker, which for some reason he did not care to disregard, he passed out to the veranda, and was expeditiously joined by the captain.

"Heh!" he exclaimed. "What's this? What have you here, captian?" as the first thing his glance rested on, laying straight and motionless, was the securely bound form of Carlton.

"A Yankee—and a spy. I had the devilish good luck to capture him."

"A spy! String him up!" said the old gentleman, at once.

"Oh, no, not just yet. But, —s'flames! we'll do that soon enough, never fear. For the present I have an object in holding him prisoner."

"An object? What kind of an object?"

"I will explain anon. Now, friend Bartholomew, you have a strong cellar, I think."

As he led the way, and Striker, again shouldering Carlton, whose insensibility had remained so deep as to seem like death itself, followed after him, Bartholomew was thinking:

"Zounds! I believe this captain with a fierce mustache has given up his idea—a decidedly dangerous idea for me—that Belle has been doing anything like what he supposed she had. I am glad enough of it—very glad."

There were two cellars under the great stone house. In one was the store of wine for which James Bartholomew's hospitality was famous, whenever a Confederate crossed the threshold; for, though close to meanness with the world in general, the boys in gray were ever an exception to this trait.

In the other cellar were only heaps of storage, and a small opening, with a stout bar of iron across, was the only mode of even ventilating the place.

Into this latter Carlton was carried, and, still bound, dumped roughly on a pile of straw at one side.

There they left him, unconscious, lightly confined and helpless in the improvised bonds, in a darkness blacker than the darkest midnight of earth.

An iron key was turned in the massive lock, and left on the outside.

"There, my dear captain, he is safe enough. But I still think it would be better to hang or shoot him without any such delay. You know very well I would like to hang and shoot all the accursed horde who wear the blue."

"Yes, I know," returned the captain, briefly, as they reascended to the merry company in the parlor.

Striker's brisk ride, and the combat with Carlton had given him a keen appetite for some of the rare wine which he knew Bartholomew kept. He could bide his time before beginning to work again his plan for the compulsory marriage of Belle with himself.

The glasses clinked and the red wine flowed in the midst of the gay officers who sat and talked in the parlor.

And while Bartholomew and his guests at this late hour kept up the sociable scenes, another scene was transpiring in Belle's bedroom, where the young girl was yet awake and had been long puzzling herself for some explanation of the mysterious note which had accidentally come into her possession.

Belle sat on a high ottoman cushion; before her was Topsy.

The little negro was on her knees, with black hands clasped, and her eyes were rolling up and around, while her jaw dropped as if in mingled awe and fright.

"What is this you say, Topsy, a man in the cellar?"

"Yes, indeed, Miss Belle, a man dar. De massa cap'n bring him to de house, too; I seed him. Den Massa James he done go w' de cap'n an' dey's flung him down de cellar whar de rubbishes is."

"A prisoner," she murmured to herself. "Who can Captain Striker have captured? Heavens! can it be? but, no! Frank must be far away and safe by this time. He promised me he would not loiter in the vicinity a minute; and yet—"

She advanced quickly to the table and took up the lamp.

"Stay here, Topsy, until I come back."

"Yes, Miss Belle. An' oh, Miss Belle, de key am in de do'. I seed 'em leab it dar."

For she instantly divined that her young mistress had resolved to see who it was that had been confined in the cellar.

By a rear entrance Belle descended without being seen by those who, under the influence of the wine, were fast becoming a company of revelers.

Noiseless and swift she went down to the damp cellar passages, beyond which were the cemented and dry compartments.

"The cellar whar the rubbish is," she uttered, as she waved the light ahead.

She soon turned the key in its lock, and again the lamp was raised forward as her glance roamed over the piles of odds and ends that were accumulated there.

Then she saw the recumbent figure of the prisoner.

Saw, too, the undercut of blue revealed by the open breast of the disguising coat of gray.

Saw, too, a face that brought a throb to her heart and nigh wounding a cry from her lips.

For the rays of the lamp exposed to her startled gaze the features of Frank Carlton, her lover.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A DECISION FOR FLIGHT.

Controlling the emotion she felt at thus finding the man she loved in such a plight, Belle set down the lamp and hastened to his side.

Kneeling, she raised his head in her arms, and tenderly brushed back his chestnut locks from the bloody face.

It was at this juncture that life reasserted itself in the young major's frame.

He opened his eyes with a deep sigh, and the vision that greeted his unsteady gaze was all the more calculated to increase his bewilderment.

"Belle! is it truly you?" at last he articulated, while she had seemed to wait breathlessly for this sign of recognition.

"Oh, Frank, how come you here?"

He smiled in a way that was ghastly in the blood that stained his face.

"I did not come, Belle; I was brought, and I had no word in it. Do you not see that I am a fast and helpless prisoner?"

In the half-suppressed excitement of the discovery, she had not observed the bonds on his limbs, or that his hands were secured behind him.

In a trice her nimble fingers were at work, and strong though the knots that Captain Striker had tied, it was not long before Carlton felt the blood circulating through his veins once more in freedom.

"God bless you, Belle, darling! But where am I? To what sort of place has he brought me?"

"Of whom do you speak?"

"The Johnny who captured me. A tall fellow wearing an officer's uniform. And a man with some muscle, I must confess. We fought in almost darkness; but I could see that he was rather a handsome reb with an enormous mustache."

"Ah!" she uttered, thoughtfully. "Then it was Captain Striker. But, dear Frank, you must make haste to fly from here. If you were made prisoner by the man I think you were, you are in the hands of one who not only is a merciless wretch but who would have you shot twice over if he knew how dear you are to me. Are you strong enough to make the attempt? There are horses in the stable. Uncle Jim, with a considerable company, is engaged in the parlor. Do not lose a moment."

He rose to his feet and clasped the beautiful girl in his arms affectionately.

"Yes, Belle, strong and anxious, you may be sure. Ah! how I wish I could take you with me."



A sudden thought came into the brain of the girl.

The man who was her guardian had, but a few hours earlier, threatened to disown her and drive her from his house because she dared to announce her unflinching love for this very man. Why not fly with him now, since she had made him her choice before all other men?

But she said, hesitatingly:

"I am half tempted to do so, Frank——"

"Half tempted, you say," and he held her tighter in his passionate embrace.

"Not that, Frank. But have you forgotten what manner of girl it is you bid to follow you and be your companion through life? Remember, I have not one relation in the world. Even the history of who I am or may be, Uncle Jim seems to have kept clouded in mystery. I came to him but a waif. I have been taught, and I may not have a right to an honest man's whole pure love. Besides, have I not always been a bitter rebel," with a smile, "and could you reconcile yourself to living with one who, though loving you dearly, could never believe that the cause for which you wear that suit of blues is a just one——"

He interrupted her with a playful tenderness, placing one hand gently over the rich lips upturned to his.

"Hush! It is unkind for you to talk so. I will be true to you, darling, as long as life is life in me. As to your Southern preference—pshaw! we need never think or talk of those matters, and our days will be only filled with happiness. Come, you say you are half tempted. Let me make it whole. Go with me, be my own wife; and I will send you to some safe little nook in the North where I can join you when the war is over. God willing, and devote myself to you as long as we both shall live!"

"I will follow you, Frank," she decided, compressing her red lips firmly.

And she added:

"Wait. I shall not go empty handed. Are you armed?"

"No."

"That will never do. We must be prepared for any danger. There are arms in the house. Oh, Frank——"

"What, dearest?"

He drew her again and again to his breast, kissing the willing lips that met his caresses.

"Let me lead you from here," she said, hurriedly. "I can find a way out without our being seen. Go to the stables. Wait for me there, and while waiting, saddle two horses. I will not be long."

Having decided upon flight, the character of the girl showed itself by the promptness with which she planned an occupation for her lover while she should hasten back to her room to procure certain articles she meant to take with her.

Successfully she led the way to a rear door, and bidding him hasten with his task, she reascended the stairs.

Rapidly gathering together a few necessities for toilet purposes, and snatching the most valuable of her jewelry from its caskets, she thrust them into a small satchel in a disordered way, then tying her jaunty riding hat above her glorious tresses, she turned to Topsy, who had looked on these mysterious preparations with astonishment.

"Listen to me, Topsy."

"Yes, Miss Belle."

"If any one should ask you where I have gone, say that you do not know——"

"No more I doesn't."

"Say that you have not even seen me since I said to you, as I now say: Clear out! Go to bed, Topsy. And here's a bright gold dollar for you to remember me by, if I should not come back."

As the faithful little negress would have begun to sob at the hint of her young mistress' prolonged absence.

"Go, now, Topsy—go. And remember—silence regarding me."

After Topsy's departure, Belle sought a room where there were a number of small arms kept, and selecting the best of several revolvers with a supply of cartridges, she hastened down to join Carlton at the stable.

"Good-by, Uncle Jim," she murmured, as she went. "You have been kind, indeed, to me in many ways; but you said to-night that I was disgracing you, and you shall not have the opportunity to drive me from your house, as you have threatened. Good-by old home, where I have grown from babyhood!" and a tear, one in each dimming eye, started from the lid and coursed, with all her effort to repress it, down her fair cheek.

Softly opening the same door by which she had given Carlton ingress, she stole forth toward the stables.

As she drew near, she was surprised to see the form she knew was her lover's standing close by another form—the last a female.

The horses were in readiness.

Still inside the house sounded the voices of the revelers, growing

louder each moment under the stimulating effect of the wine from Bartholemew's cellar.

Everything seemed propitious for the flight.

"Who is this?" she asked, with some misgiving, and indicating the second female who stood beside her lover.

And in the next breath:

"Ah, we have met before."

"Yes," answered Belle Fusor. "And to you I owe the fact of my escape from the rangers when they had nearly caught me here. I am still using the horse you so generously gave me. But we must not stop to talk here. Major Carlton informs me that you are to accompany him. We have a hard ride ahead of us, for I am sure that by this time the Confederate general, Stuart, must have reached his fighting position on the left wing of the army. There is cavalry there, and our course is through danger. Come, let us mount and be off!"

The three were soon in their saddles.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### CARLTON'S ESCAPE.

At the instant they gave their horses the rein, heading to the north and west, the sharp crack of a revolver rang on the night air, and a bullet whistled between Belle Bartholemew and her lover.

"Whew! pretty close, I call that!" exclaimed the young major.

"On! Faster!" urged Belle Fusor.

"H—o! Halt, there!" roared a familiar voice.

The voice of Captain Striker.

Bang! came another shot, accompanied by the single bullet, and the voice exclaimed:

"Halt! you infernal Yanks!" harshly scarled the voice of the ranger captain, Sorrel.

These two captains—Sorrel having joined the company in Bartholemew's parlor a very few minutes after the latter gentleman and Striker returned from having deposited the prisoner in the cellar—had excused themselves for a few moments to retire to the outside, at a wink from Striker, for a consultation regarding Belle Bartholemew.

Striker did not want the girl captured, and at once taken to camp for trial, and, possibly, condemnation.

He loved the girl, with such love as a man of his caliber is capable of conceiving for a beautiful woman, and wished to enlist the co-operation of Sorrel in compelling her through fear to become his bride.

To capture and hold her, with the prospect of death in store for her, was the object; and he well knew that Sorrel was precisely the man to assist in a plot of that character.

But before a word to the point could pass, and as the evil pair emerged into the night and walked around to the rear of the house, they saw the fugitives in the act of mounting and making off.

At the sight, Striker seemed to understand exactly what was transpiring, for he cried, sharply, to his companion:

"Look! 'Sflames! The prisoner I told you I had in old Bartholemew's cellar has escaped! That cursed girl has had a hand in it! Fire on them! That is she with them now!—two girls! Fire! I am unarmed. Wing them! Fire!"

The Southern ranger always was, and is to-day, noted for the quickness with which he can draw and discharge a revolver.

Even after Striker had uttered the last word—following it with the command to the fugitives to stop—Sorrel had pulled trigger and sent a bullet humming close to the ears of the fleeing party.

And as did Striker, so halted he:

"Halt!—you infernal Yanks!"

But on, like the wind, swept Carlton and the two girls  
"I've a notion to send back a shot as a compliment," said the major, half turning in his saddle.

Belle Bartholemew had not spoken since they began to goad the animals to their utmost speed.

Deeper within the bosom of the Southern girl grew the dislike for this one whom she deemed to be too familiar with the man who was her plighted lover.

There had not been, was not now, any time for explanations of how the two had become acquainted.

In silence they continued that hard dash onward.

And it was not long before they could hear the clatter of many hoofs that told of a determined chase after them.

Extra good horses must the pursuers have to overhaul the trio. But there were cunning brains behind the lovers and the beautiful spy.

Both Sorrel and Striker knew that the corps intended to be massed on the left of Lee's army must be at or near their objective point by this time.

The pursued, if they held to the course that had already been gone over in a wild chase that night, would assuredly plunge into

the midst of the cavalry at the junction of the sunken roads near the branch.

"Divide," suggested Sorrel. "They cannot escape us except by crossing the Potomac. Blast them! I think if we do not overhaul them they will tumble into the hands of Stuart."

"A good idea," agreed Striker.

The ranger captain drew back on his rein and shouted to the mixed horsemen who had promptly followed the two officers at their call—some men who had come in attendance upon the officers who sought the hospitality of Bartholemew, and some of the officers themselves, whose steeds were held in waiting for them by the stone fence at the west of the dwelling.

Fully a score made up the pursuing party, and a few of these did not as yet know exactly what it was they were after.

Dividing, half of these continued at a swift pace on the course started upon, the remainder, led by Captain Striker, swerved obliquely to the left toward the river.

Unaware of the maneuver of their enemies, Belle Fusor had said:

"Turn slightly here—turn. I told you the Confederate cavalry was moving to the extreme left of the army, and behind it will be placed a battery. If we hold to this route we shall surely be taken

And as they obeyed, they took a course both parallel and forward with those who were performing the same thing under Striker's command.

Then for a distance along the canal on went the fugitives, their horses breathing hard, and Diamond, Belle Bartholemew's gallant steed, beginning to falter after so much exertion as he had been put through since the hour when still sweating from the ride his mistress had taken on him, he had been so generously given to a stranger of her own sex to escape the persistent chase of Sorrel's rangers.

"We will have to make a halt," said the spy.

"Halt now!" exclaimed both Belle and Carlton in a breath.

"That, or you two must leave me."

"We will never do that," declared the major.

"Then be guided by me. I know of a hiding place in these woody hills; in it we may remain safely until the battle commences, and we know that those who are in pursuit of us would not dare be absent from their posts at the hour of conflict for the mere reason of hunting down two women and a man. Slaeken your gait," she advised, as they entered a belt of woodland and wound along near the river that they could hear now not far ahead.

"But what is the object?" Carlton asked.

"My horse is flagging. Another mile and he will drop."

"Lead us where you will, then. We assuredly will not desert you. Do you not agree with me, Belle?" to his betrothed.

"Yes," she replied, rather shortly.

Belle Fusor, the spy, had not scouted in that section without learning something more than the movements of the enemy, as her actions presently proved.

Suddenly she came to a stop before a high embankment over which grew and hung a dense mass of tangled growth, which seemed about to fall upon them as they paused there.

Dismounting, she unhesitatingly led her horse directly into the black depth, the others following.

The bank formed an arch, well screened.

There was no more than this, for when the major, at her command, lighted his fuse, they saw a fissure making into what appeared to be the solid earth at first, a huge crack, as it were, which did not quite extend to the surface above.

"Your handkerchiefs—quick," she said.

Tearing the handkerchiefs into halves, she scraped leafy rubbish into each half, twisting the pieces into soft balls.

The others watched her, by the dim light of the fuse, in silent wonderment.

Her object was soon explained.

When she had made six small and soft balls, she placed a ball firmly in each ear of each horse.

Just as soon as the operation was completed, the horses made fast to roots in the bank, and the beautiful spy had told her companions to follow her into the fissure, they heard the noise of hoofs and voices beyond their concealment.

Striker and his followers were beating about the small patch of woods where he knew the escaped prisoner and the two girls had certainly entered.

Like hewn statues the fugitives stood and listened in the impenetrable darkness.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### THE ANTIETAM.

The theory advanced by Belle Fusor, that the pursuers would have to abandon the search, to be on hand when their regiments were called for action in the morning, was correct.

Through the long remainder of the night they could hear Striker's men hunting, first, dangerously close and then far from the hiding-place, like a pack of boys at a game of "pot and blue beans," or worse, like hungry hounds that might do more than merely devour.

But the night did pass without discovery, and with the first of dawn they heard the boom of the cannon that told of murderous shots.

Once more in the saddle, they pushed onward, ascending the course of the Potomac as best they could through ways that, perhaps, no horseman had ever gone over before.

As they ascended anon on some higher eminence, far off to the eastward, they could see the smoke rolling up as from a battlefield already beginning to stain with the blood of heroes, and a strangely tingling enthusiasm pervaded the breasts of all in that little party.

When they had gone a considerable distance, suddenly a cry that he could not restrain broke from Major Carlton.

"Look—look there!" leveling a hand off to the northeast, toward the ridges and woods. "I'd know those banners in a stranger field than this. My regiment is there! It is Hooker's corps!"

Once Carlton halted to look out over the inspiring panorama, where the soldiery of blue and gray were marching, man-eveering; and all the while came those distant boomings, the thunders of the artillery at their duel on that memorable sixteenth, preceding the actual and awful battle.

"Oh, to be there!" burst from him. "See! the corps is drawing steadily down upon the rebel lines. The clash must come soon! I must, must get there. What will be thought of me, to be absent at such a time as this! Forward!"

Again the horses were urged, cantering at such opportunity as was given them in that uncertain path.

Leaving the trio making their way thus, we turn to the blue columns that were coming down from the north.

Hooker's corps, with the batteries on his right. It was past noon.

The whole Confederate force was now concentrated for the struggle around Sharpsburg.

Hooker was coming down from the direction of Mercersville, and Mansfield had been ordered to follow and sustain him.

To meet the Federals, Hood's brigades were placed on the Confederate left, with Jackson in reserve.

Steadily onward marched the blues of Hooker.

And still the cannon boomed as they had boomed since early dawn.

Through gullies and timber patches came the host of the North; firmly waited the lines of gray.

Then, when the day was well spent, suddenly sounded the rattle of muskets and zip—zip of deadly bullets from both sides, announcing that the skirmishers under General Meade had struck the gray host the first blow in the clearing of the Hagerstown road.

The guns of the Pennsylvania Reserves had opened the battle; but Major Carlton was not there, and none knew of his whereabouts.

A rumor was started that he had been killed by a stray shot at the time the division passed the stone bridge over the Antietam.

But dusk was upon the hostile forces. The boys in blue had arrived at their fighting ground too late to enter into regular battle; and after the skirmish, with Hood still grim and resolute before them, they rested on their arms.

It needed not even an experienced general's eye to perceive that the heaviest part of the conflict was to take place at the point of Hooker's approach.

Under cover of night Lees sent fresh men to relieve the force of Hood.

When morning dawned again, again the guns volleyed.

All was action now—it was thencever to be forgotten seventeenth of September!

Forward the boys in blue!

Stern answered the men of Jackson from the Dunker church.

The havoc of death had begun in earnest!

Mansfield had thrown himself forward.

The cannon belched their fury.

The thick smoke rose and rolled in great billows, breaking in patches, filled with murderous sounds.

In the din and carnage another cheer than the battle cry arose.

A brave form was seen, sword in hand, encouraging his men—the gallant Major Carlton!

He was in time to prove himself a soldier; and the hearty greeting of the men, who loved as brave men love a brave officer, repaid him for the terrible guntlet he had run to be with them.

Back and to the right of Mansfield, the thundering batteries.

Fiercest, grimmest among the gunners—Old Fusee, with white hair and beard streaming bare, and knotty muscles working as only their long experience could work.

By eight o'clock the combataunts were almost hand to hand.

The fronts of Hood and Jackson had not wavered.

In the heat, the smoke and vortex of death and struggle—hark! the thudding hoofs of cavalry!

Swooping down upon the extreme right, came the avalanche of horses and gleaming sabers.

Upon the Pennsylvanians fell the brunt of the charge.

But it found them ready with bristling front.

Foremost in the lumbering ranks, Carlton saw a form he recognized—a leader whose face was that of a demon in courage and hate.

The ranger captain, Sorrel!

Crash! came together the assailants, and the ready line of gleaming bayonets.

Then pandemonium of sound and scene.

Men and horses, the blue and the gray, all mixed, all in bloody confusion, where sabers struck spitefully, and prodding bayonets sought the vitals under the gray.

Sorrel found himself met by a soldier in major's uniform, whose sword engrossed all his attention.

"Aha! you wretch!" shouted Carlton, whose voice there, it is doubtful, could be heard by the man he was trying to run through with his sword. "We are met, Johnny Reb! I have not forgotten that you were one of those who hunted me like a hound last night!"

But the surging mass of humanity around them, with its deluge of blood, swept them apart at the very instant Carlton could have driven his weapon through his foe.

Boom!—boom! the lively batteries.

And streams and waves of fire piercing the billows of smoke!

Death was mowing mercilessly there.

On the right—all on the right, this gory tableau of living and dying humanity, in flashes of steel, in whistling of gouging slugs; louder and louder the roar, the rumble that rose and quaked the very vault of heaven!

The troops were in!

It was The Antietam!

Far in the rear of the seething labyrinth of roar and death, there was another scene—a scene of agony, shrieks and writhings under the horror of ghastly wounds and the surgeons' knives.

The hospital of the battlefield!

Well was it for those who still survived, still fought in the hail of lead at the front, that they dreamed not of the shuddering sights under the doming trees, where shot nor thrust of steel could not interrupt the unutterable misery of strong men lying in the grasp of stronger hands, to hold them while some shattered limb was cut away or yawning wound sewed up by fingers that had no time now for tender bandaging!

The shrieks, the groans there, were of a kind to freeze the blood of some; while others, already used to the pitiful accompaniment of war, moved and acted in the suffering aisles of rude reared, bench-like tables, with impassive faces and steady nerves.

A busy day for the surgeons, with their bloody knives and armfuls of swathes!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### TWO EVIL COMRADES.

Still further in the rear, on an eminence beyond the reach of the deadly range, were two female forms, two young girls who looked upon the distant carnage with faces pale and a suppressed excitement within them.

Our two Belles—Bartholemew and Fusor.

In face and figure, in gesture, even, there was such a resemblance, one to the other, that it would have been difficult for an observer to distinguish between them if set apart. More than sisters—twins they fairly looked to be.

But they reasoned mutually that there could not possibly be any relationship between them; it could only be attributed to some wonderful freak of nature, they agreed.

"Dear Belle," said the spy, "ought we not to go down there among the wounded, to see if we cannot lend some assistance, cool some parched lip, or speak a word of comfort to the brave men who may never again see those they love so dearly in their far off homes?"

"The very thought that was in my mind. Yes, we can find duties to perform there, I am sure. The surgeons, too, may be glad to have a woman's hand to assist in the horrors of their sad tasks."

"Come then."

And soon after that, the two could be seen moving about in those ghastly aisles, their lovely faces pale as those of the doomed wounded around them, lovely faces that burst upon the agonized

beings like a vision from that other world whose undreamable verge they were so soon to tread.

Girls of nerve and beauty, too, were they!

"God bless you!" greeted them by the side of slabs slippery with the gore of those whom no mortal art could not save.

And:

"God bless you!" was breathed a hundred times from lips whose thirst their canteens quenched.

Ministering angels, these two rarely beautiful girls, palely, quietly gliding amid the trying scene, with soft words and substantial comfort for the helpless, bleeding fellow men brought back from the reverberating maelstrom beyond.

Bloody—bloody Antietam!

The right wing of the Union army was now black with smoke and red with human misery.

Yet on the gallant blues! On slowly but resolute, like veterans that history immortalized before their time.

By ten o'clock the second bridge had been carried and Richardson, with thundering batteries quaking the earth and air, mowed lanes and furrows in the ranks of Hill.

The "center" was in.

Fiercer the roar and rage of that slippery field!

Then slowly, stubbornly the Confederate lines fell back—slowly, with the monuments of Union dead behind each inch they gave.

Back, back, the front of Hill before the grim heroes of Richardson and French.

Sedgewick, in the woods to the right, was pressing Jackson gradually in, step by step.

Around the Dunker church the dead were heaping.

Jackson, Early, Hood and Hill had given ground and now were abreast in a mighty line that seemed as firm as rock.

Yet on the boys in blue!

Where was the Ninth corps now?

Where was Burnside!—he who waited on the Union left to strike with vigor at Longstreet's host of gray.

Again and again had the corps that lay behind the heights received the order from McClellan to carry the lower stone bridge and assail the Confederate right.

Hour after hour the great commander waited to hear the guns of Burnside, which would have lessened the slaughter on the Union right by their diversionment.

Noon had come and passed ere the heights swarmed with the blue lines that passed the last bridge; and then there were fresh divisions just arrived from Harper's Ferry, which joined the conflict and wrested from the tardy Burnside each dear-bought inch he had gained.

For awhile the guns boomed on; but the tragedy of death had ceased on the Union right—the fire was of a straggling kind at intervals amid the pall of smoke that settled in the woody depths or hugged the gory ground with its sulphurous breath.

The day was spent.

The terrific battle was past—leaving all its horrors without a victory for either side.

Watchful were the armies when the cloak of night had fallen.

None knew what might be yet to come; the grimy faces that waited, their owners standing or laying exhausted on the ground, were fixed in stern expectancy.

Strange was the lull, in which the ears of men seemed to detect murmurs and mutterings that were like the vibration of the terrible battle borne on some perpetuating draught afar and farther into the distance.

Ears, deafened by cannon and musketry, still seemed to hear the noises of the struggle, and the glances thrown around were at times those of men who expected to see fresh helming batteries, new bursts of flame from some advancing line of blue or yelling front of gray.

But night was stealing over all; around the bluffs, the valleys, and the shot-torn treetops, the last lingering rays of daylight were hanging.

Antietam had gone into history.

In a woody spot to the west of where brave Hooker fell wounded during the terrific charges near the Dunker church, a by-scene to the conflict of the fading day was progressing.

Two men in uniforms of gray were there.

One lay with his head elevated on a gnarly log, his coat open a the front, and from his breast a trickling stream of blood that could not, would not, be stanchd.

By his side knelt the second, who seemed striving with all the skill he possessed to relieve the wounded man, who said, rather weakly:

"No use, Sorrel, old comrade—I'm a-goner."

"Curse the infernal Yanks!" gritted the voice of the ranger captain, Sorrel. "They have given you your last slug, I do believe. They haven't whipped us yet, though; so take comfort from that."



"Poor comfort for a dying man," said the other, in a tone of ghastly humor.

The man with the great, bleeding hole in his breast was Captain Jack Striker.

"I have got to go, and I know it," he continued. "There's no use glibbing and blubbering over it, either. But, before I die, Sorrel, old comrade mine, I have something to say to you."

"What is it you have to say, old friend? I am listening."

"I wish," responded Striker, evidently speaking with considerable difficulty, "I wish to say something in regard to Belle Bartholemew. 'Sfame! the hardest thing to swallow is the knowledge that I am to die before I succeeded in making that beautiful witch my wife."

"But go on," urged Sorrel, who was immediately interested by this allusion to the lovely girl.

The ranger had half conceived already the idea that he would much like to possess such a girl for his own as Belle Bartholemew seemed to be. At the prospect of Jack Striker dying, and this fact removing his friend from the position of a rival, the idea in embryo before was now aroused more forcibly by Striker's words:

"I wish to say something in regard to Belle Bartholemew."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### DEATH OF A VILLAINOUS CAPTAIN

Sorrel saw that his comrade's minutes were numbered. Whatever was to be imparted must be said in a hurry.

"Drink some of this," he insisted, holding a small flask of spirits to the dying man's mouth.

Striker allowed the liquor to gurgle down his throat with signs of considerable relish.

After the draught, he smacked his lips feebly.

"That is good," he commented.

"But you have something to say," persisted Sorrel.

"Yes—about this witch of a girl, Belle Bartholemew."

"Well, what about Belle Bartholemew? You wish me to take some message to her from you?"

"'Sfames! no. I am a dying man; but I determined that she shall not escape."

"Escape? How? What do you mean?"

"If she cannot bemy wife, she shall be the wife of the man I select for her," was the rather remarkable speech of Captain Striker, and his weakening voice was a hiss, as if even in his last fading moments he clung to his amorous passion for the young girl in a savage way.

"Blast it! I don't catch just what you mean, comrade."

"Belle Bartholemew is no kin to old James Bartholemew—"

"I know that."

"Ha! but you do not know that the girl is entitled to a snug fortune in her own right."

"No," aspired Sorrel, with hugely increasing interest.

"By merest chance I found that out—found that long ago, when she, a puling infant came under old Bartholemew's care, he at the same time made deposits and investments in the child's name, with himself as trustee."

"By my soul!" ejaculated Sorrel, now all ears.

"At the first indication of war—the old rat—he withdrew and realized every dollar. It had accumulated, too, in the time it had been out. An old lawyer, now dead, from whom I got the secret, said that Belle Bartholemew, though he doubted if anybody knew it, was at least worth one hundred thousand dollars."

"One hundred thousand dollars!" repeated Sorrel.

Inwardly, he added:

"Ho! I think I will make an effort to get hold of that money, if ever I can find the girl!"

And aloud again:

"Well, comrade?"

"I have ascertained," went on the dying Confederate, "that Belle Bartholemew is in utter ignorance of the fact that she has a rightful claim to such a splendid sum of money. I have been trying to win first the girl, then I would be able to bring old Bartholemew to a reckoning; for I am convinced that the deposits made long ago, and afterward withdrawn to oblivion in the old man's purse, were monies given to him to be paid to her when she should have arrived at a proper age to handle her inheritance."

"This is a rare secret you are telling me—rare and valuable. Go on, comrade."

"But, 'sfames! Belle Bartholemew is not to be mine," burst spasmodically from the Confederate captain's lips, under his monstrous and disordered mustache.

"So it seems," assented Sorrel, within his mind; and he said:

"Unfortunately, no; for I must be plain in saying that you will soon be a dead man, and—hasten with the balance of this wonderful secret, my loved comrade, if there is any."

"There is hardly any more to the secret. But my object in telling you was to bring to your notice an incentive to win the girl, by fair means or foul," and as Striker said this, there was a look in his fierce eyes, a tone in his failing voice which revealed a devilish nature in his heart more than could have been suspected in his character so far.

Devilish, because he knew that Sorrel was a born ruffian, and if the ranger captain could win, or capture and force the lovely girl to wedlock, it would be a sweet revenge for his loss of her, even though he could not realize it in his grave.

Had there been no incentive, this tale of a hundred thousand dollars which by right belonged to Belle Bartholemew, and was being withheld from her by sly old James, would have pricked his determination to make her his bride. Added to the revelation the fact that he was already enamored of her dashing and extraordinary beauty, he was saying, in the silence of his ruffian brain:

"Ho! Belle Bartholemew shall be mine. A young lady of loveliness and wealth is a most desirable possession as a man's wife. I will have her; at least I will have the money, and I shall devote myself to hunting her up speedily."

Just then a horrible spasm seemed to seize the Confederate captain. He writhed as he lay, giving vent to a groan of deep agony, then making as if he would have started up, despite his mortal wound.

"He is going fast. A few minutes more and I will have seen the last of Jack Striker. A brave fellow he has been, anyhow. The bullets of the infernal Yanks seem to pick out just such brave men as Captain Jack Striker. Ho! I have had many a close shave myself to-day."

"Belle—Belle Bartholemew!" gasped Striker. "Find her. Make her your wife! It will be sweet vengeance for me."

While the words seemed yet to grind out from under his great mustache, his form stiffening in the final throes.

The next instant Sorrel knew that he was holding up the frame of a dead man.

"Vengeance, he says," repeated the ranger, in Striker's words.

"Bah! what is vengeance to a man dead and his bones picked, perhaps, by carrion birds. I am glad he did not die before telling me this little secret about Belle Bartholemew. Yes; good, now. If I can only find the girl. A lovely girl, and plenty of money. Ho! I think I see a gay life ahead. For if I can but find her, forsooth. I shall make her marry me or—wish she had, that's all! I would like to be y you, comrade mine, but I have nothing to dig a grave with. Besides, I think I had better be getting out of this locality; the Yanks are prowling round. Who knows but that even now, while I have been listening to this secret of Belle Bartholemew and easing the last moments of Captain Jack Striker, I have been surrounded, and any minute may see me in the 'curved hands of the Yanks, a captive."

"Right you are, Johnny Reb," broke forth a voice not a dozen feet away.

And Sorrel saw advancing upon him in the gloom three men whose garb he could dimly discern, were of the blue he hated.

Some of those stragglers who had reduced the fighting force of General Hooker by nearly one-half, and would have brought utter defeat upon him had it not been for the timely arrival of brave Mansfield, then mortally wounded, on the field of battle at the right.

Stragglers, and of that vulturous kind who are cowards singly, but bold by numbers.

Never was there an army yet without its skulking cowards.

Coming accidentally upon the dying Confederate and the one who was administering to him, even then they had paused to consider the advisability of attacking the man in gray, whose outline showed him to be one of those rangers whose reputation for desperate fighting qualities was well known to the boys in blue.

But their number gave them courage. They were three to one. Their bayonets were at their sides; since the lull of battle, each had procured from some dead body a revolver.

With bayonets and revolvers drawn they advanced upon the solitary ranger.

"Give it up, Johnny; we've got you," said one.

"Yes; back down, old graycoat!" added another.

"Surrender, or we'll blow the top of your rebel head off," chimed the third.

From three different points they came toward Sorrel, their weapons leveled at his head, and the bayonets held in readiness for stabbing him.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### SI SORREL AFTER ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS.

The quick eye of the ranger saw that, notwithstanding they outnumbered him, for some cause they were not altogether free from fear of him.

His eyes kindled as they took in the trio

"Surrender!" had scarcely left the lips of the third man when—Quick as a pass of lightning the ranger captain's revolvers were in his hands and thrust forward.

Bang, bang! barked the weapons.

Then his arms began a vertical and rapid see-saw motion, the barrels continuing to discharge right and left.

Bang, bang, bang!

A fair marksman was Str-r-r; but under the circumstances, menaced by the weapons of the others, the snap shots he sent into the midst of his foes were hurried and without the effect they might otherwise have had.

As it was, one of the stragglers went down with a bullet in his brain, and both the others uttered a yell of pain as the thudding lead entered their bodies with more or less precision.

The unexpected and telling resistance was enough.

The two survivors, bleeding and cursing, turned and ran ignominiously.

But Sorrel realized that the shots would soon bring others to the spot.

Thrusting back his revolvers into his belt, he too turned and ran stumbling through the bushes.

"By my life!" he interjected, as he ran, "I think those louts will conclude I was the wrong man for their money. Three men! Bah! it would take more than three men to capture Si Sorrel. Yes, more than three—more than a dozen, since I am determined to survive everything now, and make the beautiful Belle Bartholemew mine."

On he stumbled.

When he had crossed the ridge on which were the woods where lay the dead body of Striker, and as he had entered another strip of trees, he suddenly, and almost with exposure to himself, came upon something that caused him to halt abruptly and shrink back within the dense shade.

At the border of the small opening he was just about to emerge upon, he discovered two figures standing near.

A man and a female.

The latter was speaking.

"But, you dear Old Fuse, had we not better postpone this visit until we are less liable to be captured by the Confederates who still hold Sharpsburg and are thick, I am sure, at the house of James Bartholemew?"

"No," said the man's voice—the voice of the old gunner, Fuse. "We will go now. The rebels will retire, my word for it. I would wager that they are even now moving stealthily back into Virginia. They have had enough of this fight for awhile. We will go to the house of James Bartholemew."

"Ha!" interjected the listening ranger, *soito voce*. "They are going to the house of James Bartholemew. And—" striking his hip in a hard, though muffled way—"by my life, I believe there is the girl herself, Belle Bartholemew, in her gray riding habit, that I saw the other night when I first suspected that she was a spy. Yes, it is she. Oho! if you go to your home, my charmer, be sure I will be there too. You will find that the 'rebels,' as you call them, have not gone back into Virginia—not at all, at any rate. I am here. I can find my rangers too, if they have not all been killed after that abominable charge upon the men of Hooker. Yes, I am here yet."

Old Fuse, for he it was, did not speak in the language and style we have seen him use when conveying to McClellan the information furnished by the beautiful spy.

There was some secret about the man, then, who talked with a disguised tongue amid the regiments and before his commander, and with a mysterious naturalness when he addressed Belle Fusor, as we have noted him to do on a former meeting with the girl when she was fleeing from the rangers.

For his companion now was Belle Fusor.

"We will go to confront James Bartholemew now, bless your bright eyes. For to-morrow the battery may be ordered away from here, and years may elapse before I have such another chance to bring him to account for his villainy. But what can keep the others? They are lovers, you tell me?"

"Yes, Belle Bartholemew is the promised wife of Major Frank Carlton."

This remark puzzled the listening captain somewhat.

Cautiously he withdrew further back into the shadows, crawling feet first under a bush whence he could still see, though he could not hear the conversation of the old gunner and the girl who were, perhaps risibly, making their way toward the house of James Bartholemew.

Presently the captain saw another couple in the gloom approaching the pair who were standing in evident waiting.

And then it was that his eyes distended in huge surprise as he noted the remarkable resemblance in stature, figure and carriage between the two girls.

"Ho!" he mumbled, behind his teeth, "two Belle Bartholemews!

and both dressed in gray. Alike as two peas in a pod! Now, how am I to find out which is the real Belle Bartholemew? the one with the hundred thousand dollars. Curse me, if I want to get hold of the wrong one."

By his muttering it would appear that Captain Si Sorrel considered the capture and coercion of the lovely young girl a fixed fact and only a question of a little time.

How far correct he was in this self-confidence will be shown presently.

When the party of four were joined, they started silently away and were in a few seconds lost to sight.

The captain arose from his lurking place and stealthily followed, while he was planning as to what he should do.

Satan, it seems, is ever at hand to aid those who serve him in life with the promise of becoming his after death.

Hardly twenty steps had Sorrel gone, when he was arrested by the sound of approaching and heavy crashing feet in the thicket not far to one side of him.

Again he sought cover, dodging behind a tree with an oath at the interruption to his trailing of the four persons making their way through the woods toward the house of James Bartholemew.

But the next instant he uttered another oath, and this time it was one of elation.

He saw two men whom he recognized to be of his own company of rangers.

"Captain Sorrel, as I'm a sinner!"

"Yes, Captain Sorrel," he responded, getting to his side.

"Thought you was a goner, cap, in that charge on the Yanks. There's not many of us left."

"To the deuce with the Yanks! Listen to me now. Come, follow me as you listen. I want you for some other kind of fighting, it may be. Forward."

With which he strode away again on the track of Fuse, Carlton and the girls.

The two rough-riders—now without horses, since that charge wherein Sorrel came near losing his miserable life at the sword point of Major Carlton—followed their leader, ready as ever for any devilment or to fight, as he might choose to indicate.

It was a perilous undertaking in which we now find our principal characters—the old gunner, Major Carlton, and the two beautiful Belles.

All that portion of the hills, gullies and roads north of Sharpsburg was alive with stragglers from the Confederate army; they were liable at any minute to be confronted by foes, who, in the still warm excitement of the recent battle, would assuredly have subjected them to some pretty rough, if not fatal handling.

When joined by the two men of his ranger company—dare devils both—Captain Sorrel made no effort to conceal the fact that he was on the trail of the four who were thus venturing away from the Union lines.

Boldly he followed the course he knew that they must pursue to reach the destination he had heard them mention.

And it was not long before the quick ears of the fair spy detected that there was some one in their rear coming persistently after them, notwithstanding they made several turns—some one who drew nearer and nearer, until at last she said:

"We are being tracked—did you know it?"

## CHAPTER XIX.

### REVOLVER SHOTS.

At a word from Old Fuse, the four dropped to their knees behind a tall and broad bush from the midst of which grew a giant tree.

Had it been daylight, and they could have had the choice of a covert, they could not have selected a more admirable place.

None too soon was the movement, for just then Sorrel and his ruffian pair came directly upon the spot.

Arrived there and, as by some strange fatality, deliberately halted.

"We ought to have come up with them by this time, I think," spoke the voice of the ranger captain.

"Up with who? What are we after, cap?"

"Two girls and two men."

"Might I ask, cap, what's wanted with them?" questioned the other.

"They're all cursed Yanks—every one!"

"Oh!" exclaimed both in a breath.

"And if we have not missed them in the darkness, I think we may catch them hiding around here. Fools we all are, making so much noise! Why did I not think of that? Listen!"

From their concealment every word was plainly audible to our party.

Fuse leaned and whispered in the major's ear:

"I make out, by the voices I hear, that there are but three. Are not you and I a match for three?"

"For three, yes," acquiesced the major; "but remember, old fellow, there may be others in this vicinity who are our bitter enemies, and a row with this trio might get us into a far worse mess."

"True. I had not reckoned on that."

At this point occurred something unfortunate.

Belle Bartholemew heard the whispered conversation. The brave girl was averse to being held inactive by the presence of only three men. She had not the experience of Belle Fusor, else she would never have done what she now did.

In an under tone she said:

"We are armed. Let us charge them. The chances are we can easily rout them."

Another moment showed the rashness of her speech and its audibleness.

"Ho!" sounded the voice of Captain Sorrel. "I hear somebody talking."

"And so do I," joined one of the men.

"Good! They are in hiding near. Beat about—beat about!"

With drawn sabers, following the example of their leader, the rangers began flaying the bushes to right and left, thrusting, jabbing, and momentarily drawing nearer to the bushy hiding-place.

It was only a question of a short time ere the discovery must be made.

But Sorrel and his vassals stopped beating the bushes and listened in astonishment to a challenge that just then greeted them, thus:

"S-a-y, ain't you boys a barkin' up the wrong tree? Who in is blasted tarantato do you take us fur, eh? Better be a pokiu' round somers war you b'long at, hadn't you?"

"Here they are in this bush. Charge into them, lads!"

But there was no immediate obedience to the order.

For while that order was on the ranger captain's lips, all distinctly heard the ominous cocking click of more than one revolver, and again the disguised voice of Old Fusee said:

"Charge away!"

"Cap, they're armed," reminded one of the hesitating men.

"Armed? Yes, they are armed. Did you expect to capture a man who was unarmed? Charge, I say!"

"Why don't you charge too?" asked one, suggestively.

Now Sorrel was no coward; to the contrary, he was a bold as well as a bad man.

But it has already been shown that at that particular time he had a very great inducement to avoid any danger that might result in death.

The audible clicking of the revolvers meant death.

If by chance he should receive a mortal wound, that would be the end of him and his visions of the one hundred thousand dollars that he might grasp if Belle Bartholemew, by fair means or foul, could be made his wife.

Even while he urged his men to drive the hidden parties from their covert, he was cautious enough to shelter himself behind a tree on the opposite side from that whence came the sound of cocking revolvers.

"I have dropped my saber in the tangle—course it!" he lied, readily; "and my pistols I emptied in a set-to with some Yanks a little way back. You may have heard the shots. At them, you! Hol' fifty dollars apiece if you get hold of the girls!"

"Better let us alone!" warned the voice of Old Fusee.

The ranger captain's offer was accepted with even more spryness than he had hoped for.

With a yell they charged into the tall bushes.

And another yell followed, as four revolvers banged and four bullets, every one, found a mark at that short range.

Badly, though not fatally wounded, the rangers who risked their lives to win the reward offered by Sorrel, retreated precipitately.

"Charge! At them again!" snarled their captain.

"Cap, I'm wounded!"

"So'm I!" howled the second ranger.

As the men thus answered their captain, Old Fusee bailed them from his hiding place:

"Why ain't yeaon a takin' us out o' hyer—say? Or, hev you concluded to let peac'ble cit'zens alone—hey?"

"I'll have you out of there yet, you cursed Yanks!" shouted Sorrel, in a rage.

"Oh, will you, now?"

The tantalizing tone almost drove the ranger captain into an ungovernable frenzy. But he controlled his desire to rush in upon the defiant little party, as he most assuredly would have done, headlong, under any other circumstances than those we have named, and snarled back at them with an oath:

"By my soul! I'll catch and string you all up on the highest tree in the wood—ha!"

The last as, having located the speaker, Old Fusee fired his revolver in the direction of the captain, the ball outting with a spiteful zip through the edge of the bark of the tree,

The subordinates, having learned what kind of mettle they were dealing with, had also sought shelter, and, wiser than their leader, lest a bullet might be sent in their direction.

While matters were thus at a stand, Sorrel suddenly saw a file of men approaching through the gloom like a line of phantoms, making scarcely any noise to tell of their proximity. A file of men with guns, whereon gleamed dully in the shadows the brightness of polished bayonets.

Stealthily they came stalking on, their progress being at but a few feet from the tree where Sorrel stood.

Near enough for him to discover, presently, that they were Confederates whom he at once conceived to be a picket patrol.

"Ho, there," he called, stepping out.

"Halt! Who comes?" demanded a sharp voice.

"Captain Si Sorrel, of Sorrel's rangers."

"Advance and give the countersign—"

"But, curse it!" interrupted Sorrel; "I haven't been in since the fight, and I haven't got any password. There are three of us; and from what I hear, that is about all that is left of my company after this bloody and abominable Autietnam."

"Come forward, Captain Sorrel."

The ranger advanced and was presently being closely scrutinized by the officer in charge of the patrol.

A few questions and answers seemed to satisfy the Confederate; and then he asked:

"I heard a lively succession of shots here. We were coming to investigate it. Can you tell me anything about it?"

## CHAPTER XX.

## WASTED AMMUNITION.

"We are after four cursed Yanks. Two are females. One of the females is a spy."

"Have you lost them?"

"Lost them!" his rage showing itself afresh at the thought of how he had been held at bay by the ready revolvers of the pursuit. "Lost them! No! They are close at hand this minute. They are hiding in that bush there," pointing off, "and, blast it! we have nearly all been killed by their fire. The women are fighters too—all fighters!"

"Well, we will soon have them out of that. But it would make too much of an alarm to have my men discharge all their guns at once. Rophart?" he called.

"Yes, lieutenant."

"Step this way. You are a fair shot. Level on those bushes and wait my word."

"What are you going to do?" quickly asked the ranger.

"Give them a chance to surrender, and if they won't, why, I'll blow them sky high, that's all—"

"But—but—hold on!" interposed Sorrel. "You'll kill the woman. I say there's women in there."

"And you say one was a spy."

"Yes, but—" as he saw the possibility of Belle Bartholemew being shot and his dreams of obtaining possession of the hundred thousand dollars gradually fading in this prospect. "But one of the girls I would not have hurt for a mint of money."

"Oh, you wouldn't? What is a Yankee girl to you—if she is a Yankee girl and a spy, as you say?"

Sorrel would have endeavored to give some lying explanation, but the officer of the squad was a stern and quick disciplinarian. Breaking in heedlessly on the speech Sorrel would have made, he ordered, to the soldier who had come to his side:

"Ready—take aim, Rophart."

And louder, addressing whoever might be in the bushes:

"Hello, there! Will you come out?—or shall I give the word to blow you and that bush into a million fragments?"

Sorrel stepped back, and both his horny hands ran pulling and twisting through his hair as he muttered, under his breath:

"A ton of bald curs on the head of this fellow with his squad! He will be as good as his word. He will blow them up—blow up the charming Belle Bartholemew, and away in the pieces go my hundred thousand dollars! By my soul! it is a raw shame!"

There was no response to the hail.

"Surrender, I say," again the Confederate called. "I give you just ten seconds; then look out!"

"Ten seconds!" growled Sorrel, inwardly. "In ten seconds my prospects of wealth will be blown to fragments! My curse, and a curse forever, on this hot-head!"

The limited time passed by slow counts in the brain of the Confederate.

"Suddenly he uttered the one word:

"Fire!"

Bang! exploded the musket.

Then silence.

"Will you surrender?"



No reply.

The officer was now aroused. If there was anybody in the bush, they were of a mettle that would not scare.

"Fire!" he gave the word.

Every musket banged simultaneously, and the bushes were torn in shreds by the bullets that hurtled through them.

Not a cry to tell of wounded humans; not a sound following the discharge so much as indicate that there was, or ever had been, any one concealed within the undergrowth.

A suspicion suddenly formed in the mind of the officer.

Alone, with drawn sword, he boldly advanced toward the bushes.

A few moments later he was heard to utter an oath, and with the oath, the words:

"We are deceived! There is nobody here! and I don't believe there has been anybody here! Seize that fellow who calls himself Captain Sorrel, of Sorrel's rangers!"

He strode back to his men, saying:

"Where is he? I believe we have been cunningly hoodwinked. That man was not what he represented himself to be, and this tale about the four Yanks in hiding was a lie with an object."

That it was a "lie with an object," he was immediately convinced; for Sorrel and his two wounded companions had vanished noiselessly in the darkness.

Vanished at the first words of the officer, intimating that nobody was to be found in the bush; for the ranger's quick perception realized that this fact would throw him under just such suspicion. With a sly sign to his subordinates, he glided away unobserved by the soldiers, whose gaze was on the bushes where their lieutenant had entered.

"Ho!" Sorrel muttered; "I cannot afford to lose time by being run in by this hot-head with his squad. How could Belle Bartholemew and the others have gotten away? But no matter—they have gotten away, and that is enough. I shall leave this lieutenant to unriddle that, while I hasten to the house of James Bartholemew, where I know I shall catch my game. Forward, men, and tread like cats. Never mind those wounds of yours; I'll plaster them deep with scrip-to-morrow."

The ready action of Sorrel saved him from considerable inconvenience. It would have taken some time for him to be fully recognized as the captain of the rangers he professed to be.

The lieutenant was of a strange regiment, and held Sorrel under the grave suspicion of being what he represented the mythical party in the bush to be—a Yankee spy striving to escape capture by a shrewd subterfuge.

The disappearance of the men and girls is easily explained.

Apprised of this reinforcement, and as it were, to the intentions of the ruffian captain, Si Sorrel, Old Fusee said:

"We must get out of here."

"In a hurry, too," agreed Carlton.

"Be in motion, then. Take the girls with you."

"With me? And what are you going to do?"

"I shall remain."

"What can be your object?"

"To cover your flight if it becomes necessary. At the last pinch I could divert them from you for awhile by even giving myself up—"

"I will not hear of such a thing," emphatically protested Belle Fusor.

There was evidently some powerful and mysterious tie between the old gunner and the girl.

"Have no fear, bright eyes," he said, "I have not lived past my three score and ten to be killed by rebels. Do as I say. Go with the major, both of you, and lose no time. If I am fortunate enough to escape I will join you at the cave in the hill."

He alluded to that same cave where we saw Carlton and the girls successfully hide on a previous occasion.

It was apparently a meeting place fixed upon at an early date between the old gunner and the beautiful spy when she became one of those efficient scouts in the service of McClellan in that section.

She said no more.

Minutes, precious minutes, were flying. Obeying the instructions of Fusee, the three withdrew noiselessly backward from the covert, and were soon safe beyond the reach of the musket bullet that presently came ripping through the bushes.

With no more noise than a climbing cat, and with an ease that seemed remarkable for one of his years, notwithstanding the knobby muscles that were his, he ascended the tree that reared from the bushes, and was soon ensconced in the leafy boughs high above range of the first and subsequent bullets that tore into the concealment at the order of the Confederate lieutenant.

"Fire away," he chuckled, lowly. "I guess you will only waste ammunition now, my bold Johnnies!"

And he chuckled again when he comprehended that their absence was discovered—could scarcely restrain an open laugh

at the turn affairs took in throwing suspicion on the ranger captain.

At the same time, the three were speeding away, having risen to their feet and started at a gait almost a run.

"Be cautious how you tread," warned Belle Fusor, "as we have seen, the woods are full of the Confederates, and we are not by any means safe yet."

The two lovers yielded to every admonition from the lovely girl, whose experience in wood lore they knew must be superior to theirs, because of her intrepid performances as a spy.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### AGAIN HEMMED IN.

Had it not been for Belle Fusor's familiarity with the lay of the country in that particular locality, the trio must unavoidably have fallen on more than one occasion into the hands of their enemies.

Belle Bartholemew felt now a strange influence attracting her toward the beautiful Belle Fusor; and the inexplicable feeling was mutual, for the spy seemed to have conceived a sisterly love for the girl so astonishingly her own counterpart in many ways.

Unerringly the spy led the way to the cave in the hills, where they entered the screening growth that hung like a curtain from the towering bank.

"I am thirsty," she said, when they reached the rendezvous; "Wait a moment and I will bring some water."

She was never without a small canteen, and, unslung this, she left them alone in the darkness, presently returning with a plentiful draught from a cool spring gushing forth not far away.

A fortunate action was this, as an after event proved.

"What can be the object of Old Fusee's going to the home of James Bartholemew through such dangers?" Carlton ventured to ask, as they drew back into the broad fissure in the hill.

"That I cannot exactly say," replied Belle Fusor. "But I know there has existed a lifelong feud between Fane Fusor and James Bartholemew."

"Fane Fusor?" repeated the major, inquiringly.

"That is the name of the man you and every one else know only as Old Fusee. A name I have ever called him since I was old enough to lip the words at his teaching."

"He is your father?"

"No," with a sigh. "I have never known a father, or mother, either. But dear Old Fusee has been a father to me, while he has impressed me with the fact that there is no relationship between us, and that I have been greatly wronged by some one whom he hoped to meet and call to an account some day. That some one, I now know, is James Bartholemew."

"It is a strange coincidence," here spoke Belle Bartholemew, "that James Bartholemew is not my father; nor have I, like yourself, ever known father or mother. Uncle Jim has been kind to me, though, in the past. Always kind until two nights ago. On that night, too, I made rather a singular discovery."

"What like, darling?" Carlton asked, as she hesitated.

"In a very mysterious manner, a note was introduced into the house, intended only for the eyes of Uncle Jim. He dropped it, and I found it; before I fully realized that I had no right to peruse its contents, I read there a threat of some kind to call him to account for some hinted villainy in the past."

"It was I who brought the note to his possession," said the spy. "I met a young negress, Topsy, outside at the time when I was hunted there by the mounted men."

"Yes, I can understand now that that must have been through you it came there, for since I have met you, I can see how the girl, Topsy, reasonably insisted that I had given her the epistle with instructions to place it where Uncle Jim would find it."

"It was written by Fane Fusor."

"So the signature told; but have you no idea whatever what this feud can be between Fane Fusor and Uncle Jim?"

"None. Dear Old Fusee has not made me his confidante in that particular."

"We will know pretty soon," Carlton inserted, "if we succeed in reaching the gentleman's house."

"If," repeated Belle Fusor. "We are in the midst of foes just now; and I can only say that I think it must be something extraordinary, that dear Old Fusee should place himself and us in so much jeopardy to have an interview with James Bartholemew. He said, though, that this battery might be ordered away from the locality to-morrow, and he probably would not have another opportunity for years to accomplish his object."

"Ordered away," echoed the major, in surprise. "Why, we will surely have a continuance of the battle with the Confederate army to-morrow."

"Fusee is of a different opinion. He asserts that the fighting is over."

"Nonsense!"

After events, however, were to prove that the old gunner knew what he was prophesying.

"Hush!" breathed the spy, suddenly.

A sound of tramping feet was heard outside, as of several persons passing.

Men in Union blue or Confederate gray—they could not tell which; but whoever it was—and there were several—they were gone in a few seconds.

The trio were just indulging in a breath of relief, when there came another sound, and this time it was to cause them a slight start of apprehension.

More tramping feet.

"Curse this wound in my hip! I can go no further, cap. I think I have bled about a quart."

"Not half so bad as this wound in my neck; a double course on it. A quart, say you, comrade? Soul and body! I have bled no less than a tubful, I make my oath! Might as well lay down and die here as any where else."

"Ho! you overgrown babies! Ten to one you are only scratched and have no wounds at all. Bah! but we will stop here and examine those wounds of yours that you are making such a blubbering about."

The men who were thus complaining of terrible wounds, and the one who ridiculed the idea of their being seriously hurt, were the rangers who had suffered in that yelling charge into the bushes shortly before, and the ranger captain, Sorrel.

It was certainly a strange fatality that guided him so close on the trail of the parties he was after.

"Look about, feel about, and gather some sticks; I have matches here; we will make a fire and take a look at your wounds," the captain said.

And in a few minutes the three outside the secret cave had a small fire burning on the grassy terrace that sloped down from the bank where our characters were standing, scarcely breathing, behind the sheltering vines.

By the light of the fire Sorrel proceeded to examine the wounds of his men.

First the man who was bleeding to death from a bullet hole in the hip; and Sorrel uttered a disgusted grunt as the flame of the fire revealed nothing more than a gouge in the flesh above the bone—nothing at all serious, though possibly very painful and ugly in the clots of blood that had accumulated on the surface of the torn flesh.

Next the man with half his neck ripped away, as he had said; and then Sorrel uttered an oath of contempt for his follower, as he saw that, though a huge piece of flesh had been cut off by the stinging bullet, the main artery of the neck was intact, and a small loss of blood was all that would result if the wound was properly bandaged.

Somewhat crestfallen when they realized the insignificance of their wounds, the two began to look around for some water.

This was presently found in the drippily overflow from the same spring from which Belle Fusor had procured a canteen full of the refreshing liquid for herself and companions.

Some time was occupied in dressing the wounds of the two during which Sorrel stamped about unrestedly, anon urging them to make haste, with great oaths.

And when the operation was through with, and just as the rufian triplet were about to move away, they, the hunters, suddenly found the tables turned; for the stillness around them was broken by a peremptory voice, shouting:

"Surrender, there, you Johnnies!"

From the shadows cast by the fire they had built, forth came half a dozen boys in blue.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### HOT WORK.

The ranger captain now found himself in a predicament where there was no escaping a fight.

But quickly he observed that the Federals who advanced upon him and his men with the demand to surrender, were without any arms save their bayonets, which they flashed from their sheaths as they came forward.

Sorrel's men must have noted this fact at the same time their leader did.

For, with a simultaneous motion, up rose six heavy cavalry revolvers. And as they rose they banged away at the boys in blue. "Ho! Give it to them!" cried Sorrel, his arms beginning those vertical see-saw motions we have seen before, and his weapon barking with a swift, steady regularity.

At the first fire three of the blue coats went down, two of them never to rise again.

But these were no stragglers.

Men of courage were they, and the remainder still pressed on to assail the trio of rangers fearlessly.

And it seemed that this steady advance must have discouraged

the rangers, for, after the first fire, their bullets sped wide of the mark, and in another moment it was to be a hand to hand encounter.

At sight of soldiers of his own colors, Major Carlton could not restrain himself. He appeared to forget the errand upon which he and his party were bent, he only saw a conflict between the boys in blue and the hated gray.

Snatching forth his revolver, he sprang from his concealment, shouting:

"Down 'em! Down with the rebels!"

Carlton's fire had been directed entirely upon Sorrel.

The captain dropped his weapon, threw up his arms and spun round several times, as if mortally hurt, and a stream of blood gushed over his bearded face.

But he recovered himself; wheeled again and dashed headlong away from the spot.

In the opposite direction, started, at a full run, the other two, but halted as still another sound broke on this battle in miniature.

"Charge! Into 'em! Down with the accursed Yanks!" were words that rung through the trees at this juncture.

Forward at a run came the squad we have seen Sorrel meet shortly before, led by the fiery young lieutenant.

Covering the retreat of Sorrel, they charged upon the Federals, and ere the latter could fly two of them were prisoners held by the roughest hands that every gripped with the strength of hatred.

It was then that Carlton realized how thoughtless had been his act.

To escape capture he must flee.

It would never do to return to the concealment he had left.

That would betray the girls.

Thinking and acting quickly, he turned and bounded away in a direction opposite to that from which the lieutenant and his squad had approached.

Several bullets whistled over his receding head, fortunately none striking him.

Examination showed that the captain had received a terrible scalp wound, which laid open a furrow clear around the skull.

But it was not a wound that a man would be apt to die with, if attended to in time.

The lieutenant was a skillful manipulator of bandages, fortunately, and soon Sorrel was considerably relieved, though still an ugly sight, with his blazing eyes and his beard clotted and stained.

"Your voice sounds familiar to me," remarked the lieutenant, while occupied in adjusting the bandages.

"Yes, we have met before; not long ago this night."

"To-night?"

"Yes. But we had no light. You thought I was not what I told you I was. Ho! you would, no doubt, have ordered me shot when you came to that conclusion. Are you satisfied now that I am no infernal spy?"

"You are—"

"Captain Si Sorrel, of Sorrel's rangers."

"Captain, I must confess, I thought you had deceived us about there being parties—Yankees—in the bushes."

"Did you not see a man—a Yankee devil—in major's uniform banging away with his pistols as you arrived here?"

"Ha! yes. Where is he?" and the lieutenant looked quickly over his shoulder to see whether that person was included in the capture.

"Ho! where is he?" Sorrel repeated the other's words. "Yes, where is he? Why, a mile from here by this time, I calculate. But hush! listen. He issued from there!"

Sorrel, still maintaining his position against the tree, as if weak from the effect of his wound, pointed toward the mass of vines and creepers that hung down over the edge of the bank.

"He issued from there," he whispered, hoarsely.

"Well?"

"Bah! did I not tell you that there were four in the lot? If the Yankee major came from a hiding place in those vines, can you not see the rest must be there?"

"You are right," hastily arising.

"But wait," detained Sorrel, as the lieutenant made as if to advance at once and boldly upon the suspected hiding place.

"Well, what is it?"

"One of those girls I mentioned is Belle Bartholemew, the ward of old James Bartholemew, who lives on the Shepherdstown road. James Bartholemew is an intimate friend of General Lee's. Blazes! if harm befalls Belle Bartholemew, you will hear from General Lee. Remember that."

"What is she doing with another girl who is, you say, a Yankee spy?"

"Was there ever a man who could account for what a woman does? The two girls are together. That I know, and it is all I know—excepting that the other is a spy. So be careful what you are at."

"Now we will attend to those who are, you think, in that tangle of vines there."

"Yes, in there. But remember what I have said about one of those who are in hiding, lieutenant."

"My memory is not so very short."

Falcon turned, and, with a frown, surveyed the overhanging screen of vines, unaware that behind it was a fissure almost like a cave.

"Fall in! Attention! charge those bushes!" he shouted, and setting the example, he plunged in the direction whence the shot came.

His men followed promptly.

But only half way to the ambush had they gone when there came a startling check.

Bang! Zip!—zip!

And again some one cried:

"God save me!—I'm a dead man!"

Another shot; and this time it was from the trees on the east. Both shots had found a mark, and two graycoats lay bleeding and dead on the sward.

This second attack, and from an opposite quarter, produced a panic. The men halted irresolutely.

"We're surrounded!" ejaculated one.

The idea was universally conceived. With hesitating glances at their leader, who was himself somewhat taken aback by the discharges at front and rear, they broke and made off in a disordered body to the north, to escape the attack from the west and east.

"Ho!" blurted Sorrel, in some alarm. "We are, as that man said, surrounded, I think. I must look out for my carcass. I must take care of myself, or I may not live to find my charming Belle Bartholemew and get hold upon that hundred thousand dollars which is hers. But, by my soul! she is in that tangle of vines in the face of the hill, I am sure, and I shall not run any further than is absolutely necessary."

For fully half an hour the ranger captain maintained his double watch, upon the screen of vines and to see who had so completely routed the Confederates.

And steadily as he gazed he failed to observe that the prisoners were slowly moving by scarcely perceptible squirming toward a certain point of the thicket beyond, until suddenly he rubbed his eyes as if there was yet some of the recent blood from his wound in them, and his bearded mouth yawned in astonishment.

For the Union boys had vanished.

He had not seen a face that peered cautiously out at the bound prisoners, the motioning hand that signaled them to keep silent and roll and squirm toward that particular point.

"I am Major Carlton, of the — Pennsylvania Reserves," guardedly said their liberator.

"And now that we are in some force, we will go to the reinforcement of some ladies that are ensconced in that vine bower over there."

"Hurrah for you, major!" said one, though lowly. "If I dared I would just like to shout a sweet cheer about now."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### "HE DESTINATION REACHED."

When the shots from the invincible foe rang forth upon the Confederates, Belle Fusor grasped her companion's arm and whispered, hurriedly:

"This divertisement will give us a chance to escape."

"In what way?"

"See! The grays are running! Now is our chance. Come!"

Quickly she gained her feet.

To see a familiar outline—familiar even in the gloom—standing beside her companion.

It was Old Fusee.

"Bright eyes," he said, lowly.

She was by his side in an instant.

"You are safe! You dear Old Fusee, I am so glad!"

"Safe. But where's the major?"

When told of Carlton's action, he shook his head and commented:

"A bad move. We must find him, though. And I think I know about where to look. It was he, no doubt, who fired those other shots into the rebs. Some one treated them to bullets from the opposite side of the opening just as I opened fire. For I suspected you were in our cave, bright eyes, and thought I would try the nettle of the graycoats. Remain here while I scout about after the major."

Not long were they to wait.

Fusee had not gone far from the girls when he saw Carlton and the boys in blue emerge boldly from the trees.

"The rebs must have cleared out entirely," he thought, else he would never be so venturesome."

And he hailed:

"Major, this way. The girls are here."

"That you, Fusee?"

"Yes. Come up the bank."

Carlton turned to the Federals.

"I must part from you, my lads. We'll meet again in battle, I guess. Take my advice and get back into your lines, and don't be roaming so far from camp. You've had a narrow escape to-night. I have important things on hand to attend to, or I would like to have you remain with me. There, now, good-by."

"Good-by!" they responded; and one added, gratefully:

"God bless you, major, for the good turn you've done us."

"It's all right. Good-by."

A few minutes later he was once more with his reunited party, and the four made another start in the direction of James Bartholemew's house, though by a round-about way, to avoid the bivouac fires of the Confederates which were dotting the greater portion of the country north of the Shepherdstown road.

Cavalry, too, was seen by them moving along at intervals—perhaps the shattered regiments of that futile charge during the day when Sorrel's rangers were so badly cut up.

Fortune seemed to be more with the quartet now, however, and ere long they were in sight of the large stone dwelling that had been the home of Belle Bartholemew since infancy.

Though the Confederate fires were to the north and south of the road, the immediate vicinity of the house appeared to be free from encampment.

By still cautious maneuvering they managed to draw near.

Fusee then bade them halt.

"I will go on alone," he said. "Look; you see that light shining from an upper window?"

"Yes."

"This is no new locality for me to be in; years and years ago, when bright-eyed Belle here was a baby, I lived not far from the home of James Bartholemew. Yonder light, I think, as it was in those bygone days, comes from the apartment used as a library; and in that library, in the long ago, sat James Bartholemew and myself, talking of one of the most sacred trusts that was ever given to two men. James was an upright and, I believe, an honorable man then—"

"What is there so very serious between you and Uncle Jim?" Belle asked, breaking in, for Old Fusee was beginning to utter words more in the shape of an oblivious musing than as if he meant to address those with him.

"You shall know all very soon. This much I will say; yonder house lives a man who has wronged you and dear bright eyes here, more than language can find words to condemn. No matter at this time; wait. Mark that light. It comes from the library. I am going there; I am about to confront James Bartholemew with his own dark deed. When you shall see that light dim and brighten again thrice, do you all come, too. Come without hesitancy straight up to the library—Belle Bartholemew will show the way, I may have a sight for you then; a man crying and begging for mercy that he does not deserve. Major, I leave these precious ones—both very precious—to your keeping."

"Have you no fear for them, as long as I shall breathe."

Old Fusee seemed to take an extraordinary solemn leave of his friends, even for so mysterious a mission as he was bent upon. He paused to imprint a kiss upon the brow of the beautiful girl spy—a kiss as reverential as a father's.

Did he apprehend that there was something ahead which might make this his last parting with the young girl he seemed to love so dearly.

As his form receded from them, Belle Fusor said, uneasily:

"I am afraid something terrible is about to happen. I have never seen dear Old Fusee so affected before. Ah, what can be the secret between him and James Bartholemew?"

Belle Bartholemew was silent. She had heard enough to convince her that the man she had really learned to love as a benefactor, and who had been strangely indulgent with her, was guilty of some crime that would not bear the light of exposure.

While Old Fusee was moving forward upon his unknown errand, a pair of baleful eyes were fixed upon the trio who awaited the promised signal.

Captain Sorrel, not far in their rear, was skulking away toward the line of Confederate fires that burned near the road by Sharpsburg.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### A MISER AND HIS GOLD.

The great stone mansion appeared to be deserted without and within. There was no sign of life; and the few horses in the stables were whinnying as if their accustomed attention had been neglected.

Closed tight were all the windows and doors—all save that one high window from which gleamed the light Fusee had called his friends' gaze upon.

During the day old James Bartholemew had been on the top of



his dwelling, spy-glass in hand, earnestly watching that portion of the battlefield which was not obstructed from the view obtainable from the eminence on which his house was built.

All through the day, watching the great clouds of smoke and listening to the boom and rattle of guns that roared upward from where brave men were falling like wheat beneath the reaper's scythe.

It was only when too dark to distinguish more than the long lines of volleying musketry that he finally closed the glass and descended through the scuttle.

There was an angry—a troubled look in his ruddy face.

"Zounds! I am afraid—yes, I am afraid that Lee is going to be whipped. Perdition seize every Yankee on Maryland soil!" Somewhat to his surprise, he noted shortly that the house was without any occupant save himself—this when he rung and rung again thrice over to give an order for some refreshment; for, from early morning until the shades of evening fell, he had neither eaten nor drunk anything, so intensely had he been absorbed with watching that wonderful battleground.

Pomp, Topsy, the cook, all had fled when the morning broke—fled to escape the terrible Yankees who, the old man had taught them to believe, were accustomed to eat negroes without pepper or salt! They were long ago far away in the hills to the west of Sharpsburg before their old master descended from the roof.

When he found that he was surely alone, a strange thought seemed to strike him.

Going all over the house, he made sure that all was secure, and then, taking a lamp, he descended the stairs to the cellar.

It was then fully night.

Down he went; and his actions were singular, for he paused anon and glanced backward as if fearful of being followed.

Midway in the underground passage between the two cellars he finally halted, and once again looked searchingly toward the joisted stairs, listening as if in expectancy of some footfall following after him.

Satisfied that no one could be near, he went to a corner of the solid masonry around him and took up a small shovel.

With this in hand he returned to the spot where he had deposited the lamp.

Then James Bartholemew began a mysterious operation.

Striking the shovel into the earth that was worn almost to the solidity of stone by the passage of feet over it, he started to dig industriously.

The dirt piled slow beside him at first, but presently he struck the more yielding earth beneath the surface, and ere long a considerable heap accumulated, and an excavation of perhaps three feet square was made.

Then the shovel struck something that gave forth a metallic sound, and—

"Ah!" he aspired, bending downward.

At the bottom of the opening thus made was an iron slab.

At one edge of the slab was a ring.

Grasping this ring he raised the slab.

A remarkable sight was revealed.

Beneath the slab was an iron receptacle, and in this were a number of buckskin bags with labels.

Gold—gold was there, and in the next minute he had lifted out one of the bags, untied the twine that held its neck, and poured out upon the earthen floor a shower of golden eagles—double eagles, too, that shimmered and shone in the rays of the dully burning lamp.

"Mine! All mine!" he actually jabbered. "It required a nerve to win it; but it's all mine—all mine! Ha, ha! Pretty gold! Oh, you pretty pieces!"

He raised whole handfuls of the glittering coin, permitting it to slide and slip affectionately through his fingers; and as the dazzling money fell and jingled he continued to mutter, while his face was bright with avaricious grinning:

"Pretty gold! Oh, pretty gold!"

We have said in a former chapter that James Bartholemew was miserly; but it has been reserved for this chapter to show the love of money that possessed his whole soul, that the reader may more fully comprehend what led him to a crime for which the reckoning was fast now drawing near.

"How many years—how many years," he continued to jabber as his eyes feasted on the hidden wealth. "Oh, nobody knew where you were, my pretty yellow things! They talked of war and the loss of everything that rich people might have. But I was too shrewd for them—yes, too shrewd. I drew you all in, my pets; I gathered you from afar and near. You came safely into the fold. While others have lost and are losing all that they have toiled to earn, you are here—yes, you are here! Oh, I could not part from you, my pretty, pretty golden prizes!"

Over and over again the shiny heap was raised and allowed to slip jingling through his fingers, and his thin lips drew back until the few teeth he had were exposed in the grin that became set rigidly on his exulting face.

Suddenly he threw up his head.

"What's that?" fell in a whispering hiss from his chattering tongue.

He cast a frightened look toward the joisted stairs, with both

hands grasping the heap of money before him, as if some one was about to snatch it from him.

For, in the midst of his avaricious glee, he heard a sound as of some one moving in the upper passage.

It seemed impossible that any one could be in the house; but presently the sound unmistakably was the sound of footsteps; not very stealthily either.

Trembling with excitement, he grasped the shovel and began throwing the dirt back again on top of the iron slab, which he let fall into its resting place.

This accomplished, he took up the lamp and hurried from the cellar corridor, muttering in trepidation:

Satisfied that the intruder could not have been spying upon his revelation of the hidden gold, he became vexed at what he considered a bold—an over-bold—entrance into the privacy of his dwelling.

By the time he had reached the second floor, he was frowning and ready for a hot speech against him.

The sound of footsteps had ceased.

But the old man had located their course; he knew that the intruder had gone to the library.

With quick, jerky strides he hurried to the library.

Within the room burned the only light in the building besides the lamp he still carried, and which we have seen to attract the attention of our quartette outside.

Waving his own lamp ahead, he crossed the threshold.

Crossed and paused abruptly, as he found himself confronted by a man with a snowy beard and twinkling, bright eyes, who turned upon him as he came in and regarded him with a steady sternness.

A screw at one of the lower windows, wrenched completely from the fastening of its bolt, would have shown how he had obtained ingress.

The older ginner folded his arms and frowningly surveyed James Bartholemew, but he did not turn a backward look at the man he did not seem to know, and whose presence there was so great a surprise to him.

"Well, sir, who are you? What do you want? Zounds! who have broken into my house formerly—"

#### CHAPTER XXVI. THE GREED OF GOLD.

Fusee interrupted him by a gesture.

And he said:

"James Bartholemew, I am here to demand an account of the trust that was confided to you and to me nearly twenty years ago. Are you ready to give it?"

At sound of that deep voice, Bartholemew seemed suddenly seized with an ague.

His hands trembled, the limbs beneath him shook unsteadily. Had he not advanced quickly and deposited the lamp upon the table, he would have let it fall from his hold and shattered on the floor.

"You!" he gasped. "You here, Fane Fusor?"

"Ay, here. You know me now."

"But I thought you were surely dead?"

"It is not your fault, villain! that I am not."

"Not my fault?"

"Yes. The same murderous tools that you hired to strangle the assassination you hired them to perform—"

"I hired assassins! Fane Fusor, what do you mean?"

Either old Bartholemew had recovered a wonderful possession of himself, or the front he assumed now was the most overpowering astonishment imaginable.

"No matter, I know that you hired ruffians to strike out my life at the same time they threw into the mountain stream the helpless little infant child of Arnold Vokes. That, even I could overlook; for I have learned since that the remaining child you took good care of. Your conscience must have smote you hard, James Bartholemew, after the report of the death of the other babe and the false report that I, too, had sunk forever out of life under the waters. The weight of the sacrifice of two lives weighed heavily, that you should have paused, and instead of destroying the remaining child, reared her in comfort and indulgence—"

"Fane Fusor, what are you talking about? This is all Greek to me," the old man broke in; but his shrunk-up face was very pale, and his ratty eyes—now no longer ratty, but half glaring upon the speaker—were bulging wide.

"Sit down," said Old Fusse, imperatively.

The other obeyed, mechanically.

Fusee took a chair opposite; and steadily, almost fiercely, he held the man before him under his gaze.

"When Arnold Vokes died, he left to you and to me his infant and two children. He left us also a considerable sum of money for their maintenance and education—sufficient to have accumulated, by this time, quite a snug fortune. Ah, you were an honorable man then, James. But the greed of gold entered your heart; it fastened upon you at night, and day, you thought of nothing else, save how you could grasp the heritage of the orphan. Night and day you were taxing your brain for a means by which you could rid yourself of them and me. You knew that as long as we were here we dare not be guilty of a wrong toward them. In a short time an assassin's plot was the result of your constant brooding.

"You determined that the children should die—have it appear as if they were drowned accidentally in the mountain stream. You determined that you would make a bold plot, you formed. One infant was cast into the stream; but there is a God above who does not permit such deeds.

"I had been struck down and hurled into the water by your ruffians at the very moment when I floated, half alive, down the stream, and Providence had rescued me from the other dark deed had been done. I saw, I rescued the babe.

"I hid dead, filled with horror by the attempt upon my life, I could not think what could have been its object, until the findings of the babe suggested the instigator of the vile plot. Loug I lurked about the place, after that, to save the other child if a similar

fals was in store for her; but you seemed not to meditate any injury to it, and I followed you watchfully when you removed it from your other home in West Virginia and came here to live—

"Stop!" interrupted Bartholemew, assuming a stern exterior that was far different from the quaking within his heart. "If I have been all the villain that you say, why have you not come forward and denounced me ere this? Let me tell you that such a tale is preposterous. I mourned the loss of the infant, and instituted a rigorous search for it. Everyone—myself included—came to the conclusion that some hungry bear in the mountains had made off with it. A bear was killed, too, a few days after the disappearance of the child."

"You are lying—"

"That is a hard word, Fane Fusor."

"I say you are lying, and the boldness you are exhibiting now is absurd. But it will not avail you—"

"Then this will."

As he uttered the words, short and sharp, Bartholemew suddenly reached up and back of his coat collar.

The next instant he had snatched from a sheath beneath the collar a long and gleaming bowie knife.

Gripping the knife, he half arose and bent his body toward Fusor, poisoning his arm aloft to strike.

But the blow did not fall.

Nor did Fusor make the slightest motion to ward off the intended stroke of the knife. Still as a statue he sat; but his keen eyes burned as they fixed even more intently upon Bartholemew, and there was that in their depths that seemed to parody the very nerves of the man that raised the murderous weapon within a few inches of his breast.

"James Bartholemew," he said, in a voice fairly quivering in its sternness, "do you think that one who lived through Waterloo, and who has faced the guns of the Southern army since the day at Gettysburg, is so frightened by a toy like that? Why, I could take it from you and drive it back into your own heart as easily as I could plug an apple from its gouge. Poo!"

As Old Fusor said "poo!" he threw out one arm, striking the other on the wrist such a blow that, from sheer pain, the grasp on the knife was instantly relaxed, and the bright blade fell to the carpet, sticking straight up at Bartholemew's feet.

"I did not come forward and denounce your attempt upon my life and the life of the babe because I wished to ascertain, first, exactly what your object was. And as I became convinced that if you had intended to kill the other babe you had changed your mind, I could afford to wait. It took many years to fathom your scheme entirely. War broke out, and my restless spirit at once enthralled by enthusiasm, I enlisted in the army of the North. At the first real sign of war I learned your plot. You were resolved to be rid of the heirs of Arnold Vokes, that you might possess their wealth. And by a provision of the will—for Vokes was a widower, a foreigner, and without any friends he would have trusted, save you and me—the children were to inherit all the money and the money would go to the trustees. You realized on all investments immediately. "You have now, if it is not spent, the accumulated wealth in hiding."

"I have nothing of the sort. If there was any money the outbreak of the war swept it away—"

"You lie again, James Bartholemew!"

"Ha—zoums!"

The old wretch made as if to draw another bowie knife from that sheath under his coat collar.

"You saved every dollar off it," Fusor continued, heedless or careless of the notion that said plainly Bartholemew would readily have stabbed him where he sat. "You have it now. And I am here to-night to make you restore it to those to whom it rightfully belongs."

"You lie—"

"Yes; the babe, I told you, was saved. She has lived with me since I snatched her from the stream. She is now a woman, grown and beautiful. She has followed me in more than one campaign, and is known to General McClellan as Belle Fusor, one of his most efficient spies."

"Ah!" cried Bartholemew, as he saw now how it was that his Belle—Belle Bartholemew—had been mistaken for a spy by Captain Striker and others.

"I will not let you lie," he was passing, burning, through his heated brain. "I will not be deprived of my pretty golden prizes at this late day. It would almost impoverish me, too, since all that I had which was at all available has gone to help the South in its struggle against the Yankee invaders. No—I will make a fight for it."

His ratty eyes—now again ratty—snapped a dangerous fire.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### A COWARDLY DEED.

With the resolution formed to be seized—though he had no definite idea in what manner—the expressed intention of Fane Fusor to nurse him deliver up to the orphan the money of which he had robbed them, James Bartholemew then began acting a part to gain time during which he might be able to form some plan either to destroy the man before him or escape in some other way the actual ruin which his visit portended for him.

Assuming a contrite manner, he said:

"Fane Fusor, you are wronging me in supposing that I ever caused an assault upon your life or the life of Arnold Vokes' child. True, I have handed, and spent, more or less, some of the principal of the children would have inherited from the father and had inherited in fact. They can have it whenever they choose to ask for it."

"Again, in my brain, he was saying:

"I would I had been cornered to write, I have not lied in that piece of information, for I have the gold safe—and will keep it safe, if I can only think of some secure means of ridding myself of this busybody who has risen from the grave I long ago paid your son to have him put into. I must have a little time to think."

Then, aloud:

"I am glad, if the child fell into the stream, as you say she did,

that you were there, Fane Fusor, to rescue her—very glad—yes. Where is she now? I would like to see her. I would like to confess what a great rascal I have been, and ask her forgiveness. Do you think she will forgive me, Fane Fusor, if she realizes how very repulsive I am?"

No—No—No! His hard effort to prevent it there was a suspicious light in the ratty eyes.

Fusor regarded him searchingly.

"The rescued babe," he said, "is now near here. Both the children of Arnold Vokes are near this house at this moment."

"Call her, then—call both. I will throw myself entirely upon their mercy and yours."

As if he daisined to fear anything from this villainous old man, Fusor rose.

He grasped up the lamp from the table and walked toward the window. The action placed his back toward James Bartholemew; and then into the ratty eyes came such a lurid sparkle as to have caused the beholder's veins to congeal.

Fusor advanced straight to the window and lowered the curtain slightly.

Then, by a sudden motion, he showed and hid the lamp trace, giving the signal agreed upon between him and those who waited, watching, outside.

With a rapid and noiseless movement, Bartholemew pulled open the door of the table by which he sat.

From the drawer he snatched a dueling pistol of heavy caliber, cocking it without a sound.

In a second he had the deadly tube aimed at the back of Old Fusor, and now his face was fairly cadaverous in his rageful and glassy expression.

Then the hammer fell, as the lamp gave the last flash of the signal.

A loud report filled the room. A crash and a burst from Old Fusor, and while the lamp fell crashing to the floor, he reeled backward a few steps, finally sinking lifeless before the eyes of his murderer.

Like the nozzle of some huge ape was the grinning mouth of diabolical James Bartholemew, as he saw the man he feared go down with the fatal bullet in his back.

"Ha, ha!" he jabbered. "You thought I would yield up the golden treasure that I had already stained my soul with crime for. You thought you had me in a corner. But I am not conquered yet. My old Yankee champion of orphans! Oh, that bullet has found your vitals, has it! and he stepped to the side of the prostrate and motionless old gunner, holding the still smoking weapon in his hand.

But he said that the others were close at hand. What others, now? Are there more than the girls—the children of Arnold Vokes? That waving of the lamp was a signal of some sort. They will be here presently. I shall be ready to receive them—oh, yes."

He looked toward the doorway, listening.

True; the softest of a moment later, footsteps in the hall down stairs, and the clutting of a door.

Somewhat to his astonishment, the party who entered was an officer in major's uniform.

Frank Carlton

But close behind him were the two Belles.

They had heard the pistol shot. Belle Fusor instantly conceived that some peril menaced or harm had befallen the old gunner whom she loved with a daughter's affection.

It was she who first saw the prone and lifeless figure on the floor near the window, and she cried:

"Ah, Heaven! he is killed! Fusor is dead!"

Speeding across the room as if oblivious of the presence of James Bartholemew, she knelt and raised the bloody head to her lap, calling upon the dear old man to speak to her.

But there was no response from the aged and thickly bearded lips of Fane Fusor.

"Wretch! what have you done?" demanded Carlton, striding forward to confront Bartholemew.

"I have killed an accused Yankee!" he answered, in loud wrath at seeing another who wore the hated blue thus boldly intrude into his house. "And had I another pistol, I would shoot you down where you stand."

"Uncle Jim, can it be possible that you have committed a murder?" said Belle, still shuddering.

"Yes, I have; and but for you and your accused father, and your twin sister, I should never be what I am now—a man who defies you and everybody who sides with you. I will have my triumph over you."

With which speech, delivered in a shout, he made a long leap toward the girl as if he would have grasped and, perhaps, throttled her.

Carlton caught and held him.

"I swear, if you try with your hand indeed killed that dear old man, I will run you through with my sword," threatened the major, while Bartholemew kicked and struggled vainly in his embracing arms.

Bartholemew now seemed to be seized—with a degree of frenzy that bordered on insanity.

Sounds inarticulate issued from his lips; he almost frothed at the mouth, and curses on the Yankee major poured hot and fast between his grinding teeth.

But as he uttered these words he combated for the mastery, there was another sound below stairs which none heard because of the feet that soiled over the carpet, striking and overturning chairs and shivering the glass of the tall backbone in atoms over them.

Another tramp of feet, and, mingling in the tramp, the jangle of saws.

Carlton had as much as he could do to meet the fierce assault of the old secessionist, who fought with tooth, nail and kicking gauntlets.

A passing cry came from Belle Bartholemew, who stood yet near to the threshold of the library.

With a final and successful effort Carlton hurled his wild-faced antagonist back to the further side of the room, then turned to see what meant the cry from his betrothed.

Instantly he started forth his revolver, and in his other hand quickly followed his revolver.

For there in the doorway, half hideous in the swathes that were bound around his wounded scalp, stood Captain Sorrel.

Behind the ranger captain were four men in gray cavalry attire, wearing hussar hats, and whose eyes, as they glanced into the apartment over the shoulders of their leader, were like the eyes of beasts that famish for some new prey.

"By my soul! you infernal Yank! I am here! I am after you!" he barked, impatiently.

"And I am here!" retorted Carlton, stoutly.

"Charge in on him, boys!" the ranger captain ordered, whipping out his saber, as he uttered the words.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## CONCLUSION.

Whenever fell the heavy sabers, there was the sword, to meet and stab the men aside; and Sorrel, who paused in admiration of the man who, while he wore the detested blue, was one to impress the beholder with his astonishing bravery and skill.

"By my life! the fellow fights like a lion with well trained cavalry. Ten to one, he would whip me with either hand."

"Clash! clash! the sabers and the sword.

Around him in an ever whizzing, gleaming circle twirled the blade of Carlton. Futility for every lunge and thrust that was spitefully aimed at his body.

Then again Sorrel threw himself into the midst of the melee, pressing the major with a skill that was superior to that of the mechanically drilled rangers.

"Dogs! cowards!" shouted brave Carlton. "Five to one you are!"

As the last word left his lips, he succeeded in bringing his sharpened sword around in a terrific stroke that sliced the neck of one of his foes, nearly severing the head from the body.

Another parry, in which this unequal and savage conflict waged; the ceiling was high, permitting full play for the major's remarkable swordsmanship.

"Clash! clash! the whirling steel!"

It was a singular circumstance that none had drawn a revolver to shoot Carlton, as might easily have been done, and thus at once terminate the struggle.

The rangers had taken their cue from Sorrel, supposing that their leader's object was to capture the Yankee alive.

As yet, Carlton had not used his revolver.

Now, when he found himself encompassed by five men, all eager for his life, and all, in his mind, bade towards to attack a man with such odds, he raised the hammer of the weapon with his left thumb.

At the right moment, in which this unequal and savage conflict defied the lungs of the sabers—and suddenly thrust it forward full at the breast of Sorrel.

The ranger leader saw his danger. But he saw it too late.

Bang! exploded the tube of death.

Sorrel, uttering a yell, let fall his saber, threw up his arms and reeled backward.

The occurrence seemed to stagger the others for a second; and in that second, availing promptly of the divaricement, again Carlton's sword swept around, and another neck was sliced by a mortal wound.

The major's act reminded the remaining pair of rogues that they, too, carried revolvers.

It was now a desperate game with them.

If this wonderful Yankee could successfully resist the onslaught of five men, and deal out wounds while he fought, what chance would they, only two, have before the terrible skill of that gleaming, and now bloodily sword?

Springing backward as in one accord, they plucked forth their heavy cavalry revolvers before the major could follow them up or again cock his weapon for a shot.

The dull barrels were leveled full at him; in another moment he would have preferred to be a dead man.

But there were others there who seemed to have been forgotten in the scene of combat.

Others who possessed nerve and the will to act in just such an emergency as now transpired.

Ere the cavalry revolvers could crack and pierce the gallant major's body with their slug-pointed balls, there was another sound—the bark of two revolvers, held and aimed respectively by Belle Fusor and Belle Bartholemew.

Before this unlooked-for fire, the last one of the fierce rangers sunk to the carpet that was already red with the blood of the slain.

Five faces of the dead lay upturned there, and most hideous of all was the bandaged, ugly, scowl-browed visage of the ranger leader, Captain Sorrel.

He would know no more dreams of the hundred thousand dollars, and the beautiful girl he would have persecuted.

Triumph and triumph! On a point of the point of the sword that had served him so well, and a faint smile overspread his heated face, as he said:

"It is a wicked scene; and we could not help it. It was their life or mine."

He glanced over to where the form of James Bartholemew was lying.

When buried across the room, the old villain in falling, had struck his temple against a chair, and the blow rendered him unconscious.

"What shall we do with him? I cannot murder him; I do not believe he can handle a saber, or I would arm him and myself equally with sabers from these dead rangers, and make him fight for his life. For, dear girls, I may tell you now, that Old Fuse revealed to me, before starting to come here, the crime James Bartholemew had perpetrated against you. Poor old man! he must have had some premonition of what was to happen, and that is not pleasant to think of, if he met with accident or death, I could carry out his intentions to the letter, and obtain justice for you. You two are twin sisters; and if Old Fuse really is no more, I will explain all to you. Let us examine him more closely."

They went to the side of the prostrate gunner.

Belle Fusor knelt again at his side, raising his head.

As she did so, she exclaimed:

"No! he is not dead! Look! he lives—he lives! Oh, Heaven be praised! dead Old Fuse is still alive."

Still alive—but, ah! how very, very faint was the spark that

lingered there, and which the girl had detected as her embracing hand came around her his heart.

Fane Fusor's eyelids quivered slightly; presently they opened wide, and he gazed up at those who bent over him in a dazed manner.

"Do I still live and breathe?" he asked, huskily. "Is it you, bright eyes?"

"Dear Fusee! Oh, you are alive, thank God! You are not mortally hurt; no, I cannot think it."

He half attempted to rise in a weary, sleepy way.

"Do not hope for me, bright eyes; I am dying—"

"Oh, no, no, no!"

"Yes, dying. It should not be concealed. I cannot be with you long. You have been a dear, affectionate girl; you have loved Old Fusee, and I have tried to be a father to you, bright eyes—yes, I have tried."

The girl would have spoken; but the words broke in sobs that she could not repress, and Belle Bartholemew and the major both stood weeping, and their eyes on the pair whose lives had been so strangely and closely bound together.

"Major," said the dying gunner, "you know the history of James Bartholemew's crime. Will you see that these two treasures, these pure and beautiful girls, get back that of which they have been despoiled?"

"I swear it to you, Fusee!"

"I know your character too well, Frank Carlton, to think that you will ever forget that oath. I am going—Ha! where is James Bartholemew?"

Old Fusee turned his head to glance across the room.

The others, absorbed solely with him, saw not the skulking figure that was at that moment creeping upon them.

Bartholemew had recovered from the blow sustained in falling, and instantly and noiselessly he had possessed himself of the polished bowie knife that was sticking in the floor by the table where it had been knocked from his grasp by Old Fusee shortly before.

Drooping slightly under the table, he did at the time, and as the recent combat between the major and the Confederates had occurred at another side of the room, the sharp weapon had remained undisturbed, unnoticed there.

Now, as the bowie knife with a frenzied hold, and his eyes snapping the fire of hate and deadly resolve, he was sneaking up behind those who stood, unconscious of his movements, looking down upon the dying gunner.

But that fatal impulse of inquiry; and the turning of his head, showed Old Fusee the danger that menaced those he loved.

"Ha! murderer!" burst from his lips.

With the whole of his expiring strength, he thrust one hand into the bosom of his blouse, drawing a small revolver which he was wont to carry there at all times.

In a motion that told of practical quickness, he leveled the weapon, cocking it as he brought it forward.

Before the others could fully comprehend what was transpiring, the revolver had filled the room with its whip-like report, and a shriek of agony went up from James Bartholemew.

Home to the villain's head had sunk the ball.

It was the cannoner's last shot.

With the action, his head dropped—he was dead!

With the death of Old Fusee our story is nearly told.

Carlton removed the ghastly corpses from the house, and the cold form of the old gunner was gently placed upon a bier until arrangements could be made to give him a suitable burial.

In an after examination of the premises, the newly disturbed earth in the cellar corridor was discovered, and with a suspicion that the miser might have a treasure concealed there, the major found and made use of the same shovel with which we have seen James Bartholemew lay bare what was, in reality, the wealth of which he had despoiled the orphans.

Ere the night grew into the small hours, the two girls were gazing upon what they realized must be their own vast accumulation of inheritance from their father, Aunt Vokes.

Of course they could never know, now that Bartholemew was dead, exactly how much they had been robbed of; but the glittering heap of gold laid bare by the shovel in the major's hands was an immense amount, and enough to provide them with every comfort so long as they should live.

By the dialogue that passed between James Bartholemew and Old Fusee, the reader knows how deep had been the wrong perpetrated upon the beautiful orphans.

True to the property was the girl, in the great stone house over which hung the mourning of death.

They were very quiet there; and by a dispensation of fortune, the building was not molested by the Confederate hosts so near, who, had they dreamed that inside those tight, closed windows was one so long as they should live.

By the dialogue that passed between James Bartholemew and Old Fusee, the reader knows how deep had been the wrong perpetrated upon the beautiful orphans.

The under cover of that night Lee withdrew with his army, disorganized and suffering, back to the soil of Virginia.

When the retreat was assured, Carlton ventured forth, and the first act to the property was to see that dear Old Fusee was tenderly laid away in a grave whereon were strewn flowers of fragrance watered by tears of love.

Of the further adventures of Major Carlton, the record of the Pennsylvania Reserves must speak.

Soon after the time we have related, he was marching again with McClellan toward Warrenton, and the beautiful sisters were on their way North.

But when Frank Carlton's term expired, he returned for his prostrate bride, and there was a brilliant wedding; it that time, now more than twenty years ago, in which the gallant major and the beautiful Southern girl were the principals.

Belle, the spy, continued in that capacity until the war closed, and since then has been the loved and honored wife of a Union general.

[THE END.]



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